CASTE AND CHRISTIANITY

Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India

Duncan B. Forrester

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PREFACE

My attention was attracted to the subject of this book as a field of considerable interest and importance while I was myself teaching in Madras, the scene of so many of the controversies with which the study is concerned. I was not, however, able to begin my investigation until some time after my return to the United Kingdom in 1970. I then found myself to my delight within reach of the great and still largely unworked resources for the student of missions which are available in London. The first debt I must acknowledge, therefore, is to the custodians of the various missionary society archives and libraries, particularly the archivists and librarians of the Church Missionary Society, the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the Methodist Missionary Society and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. I am also grateful to the India Office Library and Records, the National Library of Scotland, the Library of New College, Edinburgh, and the Sussex University Library for much willing help in obtaining materials which I required. The Arts Research Support Fund of the University of Sussex generously made possible a visit to India in the Spring of 1975 which enabled me, among the projects, to use the resources of libraries and archives in Madras and Bangalore as well as benefitting from discussion with various Indian scholars.

I owe an immense debt of gratitude to more friends and colleagues in India, Britain, the United States and Australia than I can mention here, who have read, discussed and commented upon drafts of parts of this book. I have done my best to benefit from their suggestions and criticisms, and I owe much to their encouragement. In particular I may mention Dr. Pratima Bowes, Dr. Kenneth Cragg and Professor Eric Sharpe who have been outstandingly generous with advice and help. A more stimulating setting for the preparation of a work of this sort than the School of African and Asian Studies at the University of Sussex, to which I was privileged to belong from 1970 to 1978, could hardly be imagined. I am indebted to the secretaries of the School for cheerfully typing successive versions of my chapters.

The support, patience and encouragement of my wife and children in this, as in all that I do, is beyond calculation and deserves far more than a formal acknowledgement in a Preface. Here all I can say to them is a heartfelt 'Thank You'.

Much of the material in Chapter 4 has appeared as an article on 'The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity 1860-1960',

in *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times.* (New Delhi, 1977) edited by Dr. Geoffrey Oddie. Versions of chapters six and nine were published as articles in the *Indian Church History Review* in 1975. I am grateful to the editors for permission to use this material here.

DUNCAN B. FORRESTER

December 1979.

CHAPTER I

HIERARCHY, EQUALITY AND RELIGION

(i) The Interpretation of Caste

What is caste? The question is easy to pose, but extraordinarily difficult to answer, especially for the scholar who is aware of the great diversity of accounts of the nature of caste which have been offered. The difficulty is not, of course, new; it has a long and complex history which has been outlined elsewhere[1] and with some part of which this study is particularly concerned. This history teaches us, among other things, to be cautious about producing a simple and glib definition of caste, for we are reminded again and again how much what the observer sees is shaped by the presuppositions, conceptual tools, and motivation which he brings to his examination, and these things in their turn are conditioned by his social and intellectual background. There seems, on the face of it, no compelling reason why the detached scholar who believes himself to be propelled solely by the imperative of understanding should achieve a more valid comprehension than the passionately committed social reformer or evangelist who sees caste as an offence to be transformed or eliminated, or the man who from within the system produces an account which is at the same time a justification and a defence of caste.

Caste, furthermore, is not a timeless intellectual abstraction which may be exhaustively described by reference to the *Code of Manu* or other ancient writings; it is a social form with a history of its own, which has changed, and is changing, and has certainly diverged substantially from its misty and obscure origins. Whether these changes are properly regarded as development in J.H. Newman's sense, the unfolding according to recognized rules of the full implications of a given system[2], or are rather so fundamental as to amount to a qualitative transformation of caste into something quite different, the metamorphosis of caste into class, for example, is a much controverted matter. Other questions arise in relation to the geographical spread of caste. If it has meant rather different things at different periods of time, it is also clearly the case that caste takes significantly different forms in the various regions of India. While ethnology demonstrates substantial differences between the caste systems of Bengal and of the Tamil country, it also shows great similarities. Are these similarities of such a sort as to enable us to speak, as Dumont does, of *the* caste system rather than of various

discrete social systems somewhat arbitrarily labelled caste systems? And what of systems of rigid social stratification outside India, or among non-Hindus in India? Are they manifestations of caste? Is it proper in any sense at all to apply the term caste in such contexts? This, of course, brings us to the complicated dispute concerning the relation of caste to the body of belief and practice somewhat misleadingly labelled 'Hinduism'. Is caste an essentially 'civil' or secular institution whose links with Hinduism are largely accidental, or is there a necessary and unbreakable connection?

Questions such as these have arisen perennially in the history of attempts to understand and explain caste, and continue to be the stuff of contemporary debates among social anthropologists. The considerable range of understandings of caste held by Protestant Anglo-Saxon missionaries which it is the concern of this book to investigate is mirrored in the lively and sometimes acrimonious disputes of today. Among the missionaries the normative and prescriptive element was more prominent than it is today among social scientists. The missionaries' primary concern was how they and their converts should behave in relation to caste, but their practical and tactical conclusions were grounded in understandings of the nature of caste which bear clear resemblances to the seemingly more detached presentations of the academics of today. This may well suggest that the varying positions taken up have more normative content than sometimes appears on the surface, and that the issues continue to have not only intellectual significance but an integral relation to questions of value and of action.

The two poles within which today's discussion gravitates are well presented by Professor F.G. Bailey and Professor Louis Dumont. Bailey, standing firmly within the Anglo-Saxon tradition of empirical sociology, views caste as a peculiarly rigid and extreme form of social stratification. His definition is as follows:

'For a given society to exhibit a caste system it must be divided into groups which

(a) are exclusive (no one belongs simultaneously to more than one group),
(b) which are exhaustive (everyone belongs to some group), and
(c) which are ranked.

The above are defining criteria for a system of social stratification. To define "caste" we need to say, in addition, groups

(d) which are closed (recruitment is by birth only),

(e) relations between which are organized by summation of roles,
and
(f) which co-operate and do not compete.'[3]

Caste, Bailey affirms, may be perfectly adequately understood without any reference to ideological factors. It can be exhaustively and objectively described without inquiring how the system legitimates itself to those within it, and it has no necessary connection with Hinduism, or with ideas directly derived from Hinduism. Bailey's definition abstracts caste from its whole cultural and religious setting, from all the influences in its context which have shaped it and keep it in being, and finds it on the whole rather similar to other patterns of social structure which have developed in quite different situations. This similarity encourages us to expect that the study of the caste system will throw light on parallel situations elsewhere, like *apartheid* in South Africa, or race relations in the United States. But in discounting ideological and religious factors and isolating caste as a social system from Hindu culture and religion Bailey is in danger of losing sight of the distinctiveness, the particularity, and the immanent ideology of caste by assimilating it to western patterns of social order and western ways of thinking. Louis Dumont, in particular, is vehement in his attacks on Bailey and other scholars who follow a similar approach for allowing their western categories to blind them to the specific reality of caste.[4] They seek an understanding which is value-free, but the very terms and concepts which they use are not only of western provenance but narrow their vision and lead them either to fail to notice the particularity of caste, or to treat it as in some way a deviant from European notions of a proper ordering of society. The essential weakness in Bailey's account, according to Dumont, is that in typical modern western fashion he identifies status and power: wealth and power are the indices of high status in caste as in class. But, particularly at the two extremes of the caste hierarchy, ethnology suggests that status is remarkably independent of power. The Brahman, however poor and weak, is at the top of the ladder of status by virtue of his ritual purity; the richest and most influential untouchable is ritually impure and therefore of lowly status.

The other pole in the interpretation of caste is represented today by Louis Dumont. For him caste is something totally *sui generis,* integrally connected with Hinduism, and quite inconceivable apart from the Hindu context which provides the ideology without a grasp of which no adequate understanding of caste is possible. The West

can learn about itself through the serious and open endeavour to describe caste in terms of its own self-understanding. This fundamentally challenges western sociological assumptions such as secularism, individualism, and equality, and is resistant to assimilation to western conceptual structures. Caste, he writes, is 'a social system which is as stable and powerful as it is opposed to our ethics and unamenable to our intellect.'[5] The West assumes the truth and universality of the values of secular individualism while India presents us with a radically different value system – hierarchy based on religiously sanctioned concepts of purity and pollution. The ideology in the light of which alone caste is to be correctly understood is a religious ideology, and to neglect the significance of this ensures a radical distortion of understanding. It follows that caste can only be found in its true sense within a Hindu context, where this specific religious ideology has force. Outside India – in Sri Lanka, or among the Pathans, for instance – true caste does not and cannot exist, while within the Hindu context caste distinctions, practices, and attitudes persist remarkably even among those who have apparently rejected Hinduism and adopted a religion like Christianity, Islam or Judaism which makes egalitarian professions. The old hierarchical caste attitudes survive because the change of belief has not gone deep enough to combat the pervasive influence of the ideology of hierarchy.

Dumont's position, which is a development in the tradition of Durkheim of the earlier work of Bouglé, represents a sociology deeply influenced by philosophical idealism. His emphasis on the significance of normative ideology is a useful corrective to those who conceive it possible to set aside questions of value in sociological analysis, and his attempt to explicate caste as it were from the inside, rather than forcing it into an alien and ill-fitting conceptual structure, has made his book a sociological classic. But we must ask through whose eyes it is that he seeks to look. Jonathan Parry is certainly correct in suggesting that his account of the ideology of caste 'derives from a rather brahmanical view of the world'[6] which is not shared or understood by many of those lower in the hierarchy. Does this then mean that they are still in the system, or is their view of the system, perhaps as a structure of exploitation and oppression, any less valid than the more clearly articulated and literate understanding to be found, for instance, in the sacred writings? Dumont's work may be an intellectual *tour de force*, but it is doubtful whether it provides an adequate account of the variegated reality of Indian social life, in particular because he is obliged to neglect or

explain away the quite substantial elements of egalitarian ideology which are and have been influential in India, and bases his whole project on undemonstrated and questionable assumptions about the architectonic role of ideology in society. Furthermore, Dumont gives the impression that caste is a static phenomenon, which hardly changes in its essentials, and in particular cannot continue in a thoroughly secularized form.

Our brief consideration of Bailey and Dumont has shown that scholars are still far from agreement as to the nature of caste. It is not our intention to arbitrate between the two positions, or to produce a definition of our own. Dumont and Bailey represent two extremes in a spectrum of interpretations which is significant for us because it demonstrates the continuing complexity involved in attempts to understand caste, as well as presenting lines of interpretation most of which are to be found also in the earlier period with which we are primarily concerned. There are differences, of course, between the contemporary debate among anthropologists and the earlier debates among missionaries, particularly arising from the fact that the missionaries had a quite explicit and usually dominant practical interest: they had to understand caste in order to deal with it. Caste was an obstacle to evangelism which they wished to remove or circumvent, or it was at least potentially an object and instrument of evangelism, or it stood in a neutral position in relation to missionary efforts. Its nature must be understood if practice was to be judicious and efficacious. Missionary understandings of caste were accordingly far more openly evaluative than most modern social scientists would think proper. The debate between Bailey and Dumont, however, makes it clear that both positions involve normative elements, even if these do not always appear on the surface. Dumont, for instance, accuses Bailey not unjustly of smuggling western egalitarian and individualist presuppositions into a definition which is ostensibly value-free; in as far as Dumont presents a view of the ideology of caste as seen from the inside of the system (and indeed from the top of the system) he is expounding a theory which not only describes but legitimizes caste hierarchy. If fact and value are so closely intertwined for the scholar whose dominant motive is understanding, if what he sees is so deeply influenced by the values he brings to his study, we need not be surprised if missionaries, who were so much more openly evaluative in their approach, saw some aspects of caste with quite unusual clarity, and were singularly blind to others.

The purpose of this study is to examine critically the understanding

and assessment of caste as it developed among Anglo-Saxon Protestant missionaries and Indian Christians associated with these particular missions from the late eighteenth century to recent times. Some of the sources of these attitudes are clearly European and some quite explicitly Christian. We will endeavour to relate these to the European climate of thought and, more specifically, to the particular schools of theology and the denominational and social contexts from which the missionaries came. Other influences arise from the encounter with the reality of India. Even those early missionaries who were predisposed to approve of a hierarchical social order or believed that interference in matters of social behaviour was hardly their proper business quickly discovered that caste presented an obstacle of unexpected strength to conversion, and consequently began to denounce caste for reasons which were initially largely tactical. Opinions were also modified by dialogue with other missionaries of different theological persuasion — a process which can best be traced in the discussions of the various interdenominational missionary conferences. The missionaries learnt too, through controversy with Hindus and from discussion with converts, that an adequate assessment of caste demanded a far more detailed understanding of the Hindu tradition than many of them had possessed. Attitudes changed in response to increased knowledge, and also in the light of changing theological fashion and changes in the Indian situation. And increasingly during our period Christian attitudes towards caste began to have an influence on government policy and indeed on Indian society as a whole.

The variety of understandings of caste among Anglo-Saxon Protestants was considerable, particularly up to the middle of the nineteenth century, and the other Christian views on caste, to be noticed briefly later in this chapter, extend the range even futher. At the one extreme were those who saw caste as a purely 'civil' institution which was on the whole religiously indifferent and morally at least as acceptable as western forms of social order. At the other extreme caste was understood as an integral part of Hinduism which must be opposed as representing a false theology and leading to quite unacceptable patterns of behaviour.

The development of a range of missionary understandings of caste will be explored historically in relation to the variety of social backgrounds from which missionaries came and the intellectual, and particularly theological, equipment which they brought with them. It would be too simple to suggest that these things, combined with their evangelistic motives, determined how they saw caste. They

encountered the reality of caste and used the tools which were available to them for its understanding, but they also sharpened these tools, and sometimes acquired new and more appropriate ones for the job in hand. Both theology and missionary strategy were modified in response to the encounter with the realities of Hindu society. It would be possible, but not very illuminating, to dismiss the attitudes to caste held by missionaries and their converts under the blanket condemnation of 'ethnocentrism' - the arbitrary projection of western prejudices uncontrolled by any real understanding of Indian society and religion, an expression of cultural imperialism. The fact that many of the most strenuous critics of caste seemed to find unacceptable a great deal else in India that was different from what they knew at home lends some credence to such a view. But there were others too, whose assessment of things Indian was more discriminating, who accepted and loved much in Indian culture and religion, but still saw caste as an abomination despite their knowledge and sympathy. Why is it that even those who had the greatest eagerness to accommodate Christianity to Indian culture and the greatest love for India shared with the more aggressive and obviously ethnocentric Christians a peculiar uneasiness about caste? Why is it that caste among all the features of Hinduism fairly consistently attracted the strongest attacks and aroused the least sympathy among Christians? Why did Protestants come with virtual unanimity to see caste as incompatible with Christianity?

We must trace the roots of Protestant attitudes to caste to a deeper level than regarding them simply as typical expressions of western imperialism or products of the social and economic position of the concerned missionaries. These factors are certainly important, particularly in accounting for divergencies of interpretation and forms of articulation. But it is necessary first to look at the Christian heritage which the missionaries so constantly emphasized in their arguments, and ask how far it generated and sustained the egalitarian conclusions which were derived from it. Protestants in general were far more outspoken and vigorous in their antagonism to caste than were secular scholars, particularly the utilitarians, whose dislike of caste was based on rather different premises. James Mill, for example, regarded caste as an irrational institution which obstructed human progress by inhibiting competition and confining the intellect within narrow bounds: 'The appointment of fixed, unalterable castes and professions, must oppose an irresistible barrier to human advancement.' Thus caste ensures, 'A perpetuity of ignorance and misery to the human race.'[7] But when it came to pressing home an

attack on caste, the utilitarians were far more hesitant than the missionaries and allocated to the issue a much lower priority.

(ii) Christianity and Equality

Both missionaries and more secular western thinkers for the most part shared the pervasive assumption of modern western social thought that inequality is a problem, that it is, as the very term suggests, a deprivation of the proper, desirable, and natural state of equality. Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1754) was symptomatic of a dominant trend of thought: inequality is a problem requiring explanation, an unnatural ailment calling for proper diagnosis and treatment. Ralph Dahrendorf shows that the questions of the roots of inequality and how to eradicate or minimize it were the foundation problems of sociology, and continue some of its primary concerns.[8] The value assumptions behind the modern affirmation of equality are rarely examined. Equality is seen as the necessary concomitant of social justice, of a humane and caring social order, of human dignity, and of progress. Inequality, on the other hand, breeds racialism, the denial of the proper claims of the individual, and reaction.[9]

It is one of the virtues of Louis Dumont that he has taught us to examine critically the western axiom of equality. By inviting us to look seriously and in an open-minded manner at caste he believes that the West will learn that its own society is far from being as egalitarian as it often pretends, and that an alternative social order based on the principle of hierarchy has its own very real values. But even granted that western society has seldom, if ever, displayed as much real equality in practice as its vehement affirmation of the value of equality might lead one to expect, there remains the question of the roots of modern western egalitarian thought. Dumont is undoubtedly correct in suggesting that the modern western passion for equality and tendency to see unashamedly hierarchical social orders such as caste as rather offensive aberrations is 'of Christian ancestry'.[10] He does not, unfortunately, investigate the Christian roots of egalitarianism. Had he done so he would quickly have discovered that Christian egalitarianism has frequently been all but totally obscured by no less Christian affirmations of hierarchy. We have not the space here to give more than a very cursory mention of some of the egalitarian strands in the Christian tradition, and the countervailing forces which so often all but destroyed them.

If we look first at the Old Testament we find that racial and social

distinctions are not part of the created order. There is one common origin for men, and distinctions between men are consequent upon the Fall. Unlike *varna* which according to the *Rigveda* is part of the original structure of things[11], differences of status are seen as signs of degeneration. This is true even of the election of Israel, which creates, as it were, a significant difference between God's chosen people and 'the nations'. The dominant emphasis is not on Israel's privilege, but on her responsibility for the whole of mankind; one aspect of her vocation concerns the final restoration of equality among men. Within Israel, it is true, there are social gradations, but we are reminded again and again that all Israelites are brothers, who must show special consideration for the orphan, the widow, and the non-Israelite dwelling among them. All are subject to the one law, and entitled to expect equal justice.[12] Periodical redistributions of property and release of slaves are enjoined to emphasize that gross inequality of wealth is not to be allowed to become permanent. No Israelite is ritually impure by reason of his birth.

In the New Testament the universalistic element becomes more explicit and central, although to be sure there continues to be a tolerant acceptance of *civil* inequalities and a sometimes ambivalent attitude to the relation of Jew and Gentile. The kingdom of heaven is open to all believers, and the obligation to treat all men as brothers is pressed home in the parable of the Good Samaritan and many another place. Jesus is among his disciples 'like a servant', identifying as an equal with the lowliest of men.[13] The Pauline epistles argue that the old barriers, enmities, and inequalities have been overcome on the cross.[14] Within the church there is to be a new equality and membership is open to all, although there remains a necessary and desirable distinction of functions, but not of status.[15] Thus 'the limitations which beset the Old Testament recognition of equality are broken down.'[16]

It is true, of course, that equality was not seen as having direct and immediate applicability to the social and political order. Paul himself tolerated slavery, and sent Onesimus the runaway slave back to his master – but he returned him as a brother. Nor was he averse to allocating women a lowlier status within the church than men, although in doing so he may well have thought primarily in terms of differentiation of function rather than difference of status, and sought to avoid giving unnecessary offence to society at large. But even if at the beginning there was no attempt to influence the state or the broader community in an egalitarian direction, the effect of the new affirmation of equality was indeed profound. Max Weber

regarded the equality of believers at the Lord's Table, established as a result of the dispute between Peter and Paul at Antioch, as an important historical and social turning-point.[17] From then on the eucharist never ceased to be a rite of commensalism in which the brotherhood and equality of all was proclaimed and an egalitarian norm affirmed over against the inequalities of secular life.

We would wish, therefore, to go somewhat further than John Plamenatz, who argued that 'There is no logical connection between Christianity and the modern belief in equality. The Gospels face no social problems; they merely ignore them. They preach the least worldly of religions and are much less interested in man's relation to man than in his relation to God.'[18] The relation of Christianity and equality may be oblique, but it is real; the early Christians' affirmation of the equality of all men *before God* led gradually and necessarily to a desire for equality in secular life as well. The strong hierarchical dimension in Christian thought derives largely from philosophies such as Neo-platonism and Aristotelianism which, although not of Christian origin, were used for the undergirding and development of Christian thought.[19] The continuing radical egalitarian emphasis of Christianity is demonstrated by the remarkable proliferation of egalitarian protest movements which arose within a Christian context and regularly relied upon biblical and theological arguments to present equality as a Christian thing, and rank, status, and disparities of wealth as having no Christian sanction or justification.[20] Christian egalitarianism has a continuous history, even if for much of the time it was very much a minority tradition within Christendom.

A major concern of this study is the process whereby Protestants in India came to place increasing emphasis on equality as a Christian virtue, and to attack caste and the principle of hierarchy as antagonistic to Christianity. Just why mainstream Protestantism in India was so much more reluctant to sanction caste than it had been to support class in Europe is a question which will engage our attention later. It is on the face of it rather strange that even established churches adopted in India a radically egalitarian line which in Europe was associated mainly with the more extreme dissenting sects, and which can be traced back, not to the mainstream of the Reformation, but to Muntzer, John of Leyden, the Levellers, and the Diggers.

(iii) Religious Egalitarianism in India

Jonathan Parry has argued most convinvingly that Dumont makes

inadequate allowance for the prevalence of religiously based egalitarian notions and movements in India, even within specifically Hindu society.[21] This provides a salutary reminder that we must not think in simplistic terms of an egalitarian West contrasted with a hierarchical India. The facts are far too complex to be fitted into such a scheme. India has had numerous religious movements of an egalitarian sort, providing interesting comparisons with the Protestant Christianity which is our primary concern.[22]

Buddhism, various *bhakti* sects, and more modern movements such as the Arya Samaj spring immediately to mind. In some cases it remains an open question how far these movements represented an attack on caste rather than simply an escape from caste. 'It has long been recognized', writes Dumont, 'that Buddha himself, if he transcended caste, did not attack or reform it'.[23] But the more we learn of religious protests against caste and religious avenues of escape from caste, particularly in the period prior to the western impact, the more we are impressed by the capacity of Hindu India to contain and neutralize the impact of such movements. There seems to be much truth in Dumont's remark: 'A sect cannot survive on Indian soil if it denies caste.'[24]

If we consider the Lingayats in Mysore or the Arya Samaj in more recent times in north India we see instances of sects which made egalitarian pronouncements and recruited from various castes but themselves ended up in many ways as castes rather than open sects, their practice increasingly diverging from any egalitarian claims they still felt obliged to make. Other sects such as the Narayana Guru movement in Kerala effectively recruited only from one caste – in this case the Ezhavas – and now operate very much as a caste association, their egalitarian claims being in practice little more than demands for the advancement of the Ezhavas. David Pocock's important study of the Swami Narayan movement in Gujarat makes some extremely interesting points about the relation of caste and sect.[25] While agreeing with Dumont that a sect which consistently presents an uncompromising hostility to caste in all its manifestations cannot survive in India, Pocock points out that many modern sects combine the making of egalitarian and universalistic statements which ensure their relevance in situations where the traditional symbiotic and interdependent relationship of castes is breaking down, with continuing affirmation of caste distinctions. Caste rules and status 'are now defined and confined within a theology which remains, despite all accommodations, egalitarian in spirit.'[26] Where this process takes place, continuity both social and

religious may be maintained in the midst of radical change, and the members of the sect can adapt themselves without difficulty to the very different *mores* of modern urban life while maintaining contact with their fellows in the village, where the traditional caste rules are more firmly enforced. Caste distinctions are observed in as far as the sect authorizes obedience to them, and may be adapted to conform more closely to the egalitarian dimension in the sect's theology. While Pocock's analysis suggests that egalitarian sects are not as totally neutralized and transformed from sects into castes by being absorbed into the caste system as some earlier studies had suggested, he does not seem to recognize an egalitarian theology as having any initiatory rather than reflective role in social change.

Certainly if we consider the case of the Syrian Christians in Kerala (whom we will look at in more detail later[27]) we have a clear instance of the process Pocock describes, except that since the reawakening of the community under outside stimulus the egalitarian element in their theology has been strongly emphasized. Not only are Syrian Christians notably adaptable to urban life and open to westernization, but the more articulate among them are now bitterly critical of the community's traditional form of accommodation with caste. And this is presumably because they recognize an embarrassing conflict between the egalitarianism of Christian theology and the actual practice of their community.

A not dissimilar situation has been noted among Muslims. Indian Muslims are divided into a number of caste-like groups, and these groups are generally indeed regarded as castes by their Hindu neighbours, and allocated a recognized place in the local hierarchy. The difference is that the theology of caste is not accepted by the Muslims, and they have a more or less vital attachment to a Great Tradition which seems to be egalitarian and antagonistic to the principles of caste.[28] Indian Muslims are pulled in two directions. They may blend into Indian society and yet retain their own distinctiveness if they operate as a group of castes and recognize the hierarchial principle. Or they may affirm strongly their commitment to the Islamic Great Tradition and distinguish themselves from their social context as an egalitarian community which does not recognize or accommodate itself to caste. The alternatives are, of course, polar extremes, and in fact Muslim groups have rarely so submerged themselves in caste society that their link with the egalitarian Islamic theology has been entirely broken. The case was somewhat different with the Bene Israel of Bombay. Their link with the Jewish Great Tradition had for centuries been of the most tenuous, and when they

came in touch first with Christian missionaries and then with western Jews in the nineteenth century they were socially virtually entirely assimilated to caste society. Outside contacts led to a renewed link with the Great Tradition which stimulated most of them to a renewed and deepened sense of Jewish identity, and a consequential rejection of caste. Many of them moved to the city, where they could operate as a community rather than a caste, or to Israel.[29]

It is easy to give too much importance to the influence of caste upon non-Hindu religious groups within India and to assume that they are all fast becoming castes with their own distinctive cult and theology, but with no reciprocal influence on their social context, and with their egalitarian theology having negligible, if any, influence on behaviour. This is the impression Dumont gives in his discussion of the question whether there are castes among non-Hindus.[30] He believes that egalitarian ideals among Christians or Muslims have been powerless against the hierarchical principles of caste, and suggests, rather strangely, that this impotence is because Islam and Christianity did not offer or impose an alternative social order to that of caste.

Protestant criticisms of caste in India were not introduced from outside into a situation where there was virtually unanimous contentment with caste. Recurrent protests against caste and its ideology show that this was far from being the case. Nor should we exaggerate the capacity of caste to assimilate and neutralize egalitarian protest movements. Certainly the specific attack on caste with which we are concerned has aroused various and important responses, and it would be hard to show that it had been rendered innocuous.

(iv) Varieties of Christian Attitudes to Caste

Before we turn to a detailed examination of Protestant Anglo-Saxon attitudes to caste, their roots, development and impact, it is necessary to note briefly the attitudes towards caste of some other Christian traditions. We do this not simply because these matters are interesting in themselves, but because the attitudes with which we are primarily concerned in this work were developed in debate and controversy, particularly with differing views held by other Christians.

We may appropriately start with some further reference to the Syrian Christians of Malabar. Little can be said with certainty about the origins of this community, but they are undoubtedly ancient, and

many Syrians believe that the church was first established in Malabar by the apostle Thomas himself. What is clear is that, however the church was in fact established, the Syrian Christians have been for centuries encapsulated within caste society, regarded by Hindus as a caste, occupying a recognized (and high) place within the caste hierarchy, and distinguished from other castes primarily by the peculiarity of their cult and the fact that their priesthood and episcopate recognized itself as closely and necessarily linked with the church outside India. The Syrian community itself is internally divided into sects closely analogous to subcastes,[31] and seems to have been quite content to accept and operate the caste system without any egalitarian protest. In the light of Dumont's remark quoted above it would seem that Syrian Christianity has been able to survive in Kerala largely because it has accepted caste. We will give further consideration to the position of the Syrian Christians and the problems which arise when conversions occur from low castes in chapter 5.

Roman Catholic missions in India date from the coming of the Portuguese, and virtually from the beginning appear to have regarded the caste system as the given and religiously neutral structure of Indian society within which evangelization, understood as the conversion of individuals without detaching them from their social context, and also the conversion of whole caste-groups, might proceed. Christianity, in other words, was seen as neither threatening nor undermining the caste system, but rather working within it and accommodating western social standards to the norms of caste.

The first substantial Portuguese missionary success was the conversion of virtually the whole of the Paravar, or Fisherman, caste on the southern tip of the peninsula. Exploited and oppressed by Muslims and Hindus, the Paravars sought Portugese protection and in return formally embraced Christianity.[32] Between 1535 and 1537 about 20,000 people, practically the whole caste, were baptized, but that was virtually as far as conversion went, for there was no regular instruction or systematic pastoral care, and when Francis Xavier arrived on the Fishery Coast in 1542 he baptized several thousand children and started some rudimentary instruction of converts in Tamil. Querulous Protestants of a later date, like Bishop Caldwell, might say of the Paravars that 'in intellect, habits, and morals' they 'do not differ from the heathen in the smallest degree',[33] but this spectacular success of the 'caste-conversion' method was to be strongly influential in later Roman Catholic missionary thinking, although similar conversions were not to be repeated in the same way or on the same scale for many years.

The mission established by Robert de Nobili in Madurai in 1606 was an attempt to solve certain problems that had emerged in the course of the first century of missionary effort. Converts there had indeed been. The Paravars were the only caste to become Christians as a whole but there were substantial numbers from other castes, mostly marginal individuals, very low in the social scale. If we disregard the Syrian Christians, conversion was seen to involve identification with the Portuguese and Portuguese protection. Christianity therefore became identified as the 'Parangi' religion, limited to foreigners and polluting castes, and conversion for the high castes was regarded as tantamount to becoming a Parangi and adopting a whole series of foreign and impure ways. De Nobili set himself up as a Christian *sannyasi,* separating himself from most contact with low-caste Christians and conforming to high-caste patterns of behaviour in food, dress, etc. 'I am not a Parangi', he wrote, 'I was not born in the land of the Parangis, nor was I ever connected with their race... The holy and spiritual law which holds this doctrine of mine does not make anyone lose his caste or pass into another, not does it induce anyone to do anything detrimental to the honour of his family'.[34] De Nobili's initial converts were Brahmans, Nayakkars of the royal caste, and others of exalted status, and he allowed them to maintain most of their customs. In particular they were not required or encouraged to break caste by associating with the mainly Paravar Christian congregation or with foreign Christians. 'By becoming a Christian', he wrote, 'one does not renounce his caste, nobility or usages. The idea that Christianity interfered with them has been impressed upon the people by the devil, and is the great obstacle to Christianity'.[35] Thus de Nobili's converts were allowed to retain their tufts *(kudumi),* their sacred cord, their customary bathings and food rules, and all the regulations governing social intercourse. It was therefore possible for them to remain as Christians within Hindu society. De Nobili felt that the effective limitation of Christianity in the past to the lower castes had been a standing denial of the universality of the faith. Only if Christianity could be seen as transcending rather than destroying caste barriers could it be more than a sect of low-caste converts. 'Whoever says that it is the law of the Parangis, fit only for low castes', he wrote, 'commits a very great sin, for the true God is not the God of one race but the God of all. We must confess that he deserves to be equally adored by all. Therefore he who wants to attain the glory of Paradise must learn about this God and walk in conformity with His holy will, and do nothing which brings dishonour to his

caste, and whoever dares say the contrary deserves the punishment of Hell'.[36]

De Nobili's methods were severely challenged within the Catholic church and led to the famous controversy about the so-called 'Malabar Rites'[37] In spite of papal decrees of 1734 and 1744 denouncing untouchability as alien to Christianity, and widespread criticism of the Jesuits who were identified with this policy of accommodation, it became generally accepted among Catholics that caste was a civil institution which could be used for evangelistic purposes and maintained with only minor modifications within the Church. Pressure from the Curia, however, was consistent in urging that whatever concessions might be made in practice, 'the missionaries should make every effort to propagate everywhere the idea of the equality of all men before God'.[38]

Accommodation has, of course, a long history and deep roots within the Catholic tradition: it was certainly no sudden innovation on the part of the Jesuits.[39] And it has always found energetic defenders, arguing that the people of India are used to group rather than individual action; that a caste group which becomes Christian is saved from 'social dislocation' because the old 'social controls' remain; that the existence of a converted group is a more compelling testimony than that of an individual. Caste and creed are not inseparable, and those who insist that caste must be given up on conversion really seek to denationalize their converts. Furthermore, 'caste keeps the converts in the church' even if it keeps some non-Christians away from it. Hence a Catholic scholar writing in 1937 could discern a gradual reduction in caste consciousness and caste observance within his church, but admitted that it still remained: 'Within the Catholic Church the caste *system* has a limited scope. There is no anarchical wish to tear up the rails along which the train of Indian society has run for over a thousand years. But the caste *spirit* cannot be countenanced'.[40]

For a variety of reasons, the Protestant nations, unlike Portugal, started trading and colonizing activities in India long before they took any interest in missionary work. Suffice it to mention at this point that the dominant theology both among Lutherans and Calvinists held that the gospel injunction to go and preach to all nations lapsed with the end of the apostolic age, and that although God might decide in his own good time to gather in the nations, there was certainly no need for the Church to send out missionaries, and indeed missionary work would be a clear flouting of the divine purpose. This position began to be challenged here and there in the

late seventeenth century and in particular in the German Pietist movement centred at the University of Halle, in which the dominant figures were Spener and Francke. The Halle pietists were very influential at the Danish court, where the royal preacher was one of their number. Thus it happened that the Danish King Frederick IV sponsored a mission to be based on the little Danish fort of Tranquebar on the Coromandel Coast, but all the early missionaries were Germans recommended by Francke at Halle. To make matters even more confused, the Anglican S.P.C.K. began shortly after the mission's inauguration in 1706 to support it financially, and George I lent it his royal patronage.

Zieganbalg, and the colleagues who joined him later, arrived in India in virtually total ignorance of the land, its cultures and religion, and with only the vaguest ideas of how they were to operate. Theologically they brought with them a fairly typical brand of Lutheran pietism: highly individualistic and emphasizing Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms – politics, culture, even forms of church government are irrelevant to Christian faith. Socially, therefore, we should expect them to be conservative. Their first task was to master three new languages – English, Portuguese, and, most difficult of all, Tamil. Then they set themselves to find out as much as possible about the religion and customs of the people by way of long discussions, the records of many of which survive.[41] They also produced translations of many Tamil works and careful studies of South Indian religion which are still mentioned with respect by scholars.[42] The tendency of these studies seems to be clearly influenced by Luther's 'two kingdoms' theory, which suggests that it is possible and indeed necessary to separate religious matters from social. The caste system barely finds a mention, and then in the most neutral and peripheral way we are told that the 'Malabarians' are divided into castes, and that lack of caste among Christians is an obstacle to the Malabarians' acceptance of Christianity. 'God has created', the Malabarians believe, 'several kinds or classes of men separately (they reckon on 96 sorts, which are to be distinguished by their Callings and Professions. There one is not permitted to intermarry with another. Two sorts may not eat together, nor use the same Ceremonies in Worship, or dressing their Meat). The Christians have no regard to this law of the Creation, but Men and Women come promiscuously into their Temples, and therefore we cannot embrace such a Religion'[43] And later in the same book: 'But if all the Body of the Nation did accept proposals of joining with you in Worship, it (conversion) might easily be effected; and more especially your Law

would be quickly received by those Men among us, who have renounced the World, and make no difference between Meats, or between the different kinds of men.'[44] But however tolerant the missionaries themselves might be towards caste, they recognized from the beginning that on the other side conversion was regarded as involving loss of caste, and this impeded their efforts, particularly among the higher castes: 'For, as for the rich and great, there are so many obstructions to hinder them from changing their Faith, and thereby losing their *Caste* or *Tribe, that it is easier for a camel,* etc. For the moment that they lose their caste, they can no longer converse, eat or drink with any of their Caste or Kindred, nor indeed with those of any other Caste; so that such must in true literal sense, *forsake Wife, Children, Houses, Lands, Friends,* etc. Which is a degree of faith few or none of them could ever arrive to. And as to the poorer sort, and such as have no caste, to value themselves upon, they are so vile a People, that, for a little Rice, they will be of any Religion, for as small a consideration leave it again'.[45]

Thus from the very beginning the Lutherans seemed faced by two possibilities, between which they fluctuated, but both of which distinguished them clearly from other Protestant missionaries. On the one hand they could treat caste as simply irrelevant to their efforts, seeking to convert individuals whose keeping or breaking of caste would have no relation to their religious profession. This point of view, a typically pietist one, was unquestioned at the beginning, and dominant for most of the time. Later it was sophisticated by a distinction between the caste spirit and caste distinctions. The caste spirit was a spirit of pride which directly influenced religious behaviour and therefore must be combated, but most caste practices were secular and therefore religiously unobjectionable. The destruction of the caste spirit might gradually affect secular behaviour but this was by no means something to be forced. The other possibility was that India might be evangelized through the conversion of caste groups - roughly the position of Xavier and de Nobili.[46]

Later Lutheran missionaries, under the influence of Romanticism,[47] developed a sophisticated theology of the 'nations' which led to a very different approach to the issue of caste from that adopted by most Anglo-Saxon Protestants, and involved the abandonment of the characteristic individualism of the pietistic tradition. The missionary side of this theology is well put by Dr. Grundemann, Director of the Berlin Mission in India, in the 1890s: 'Missionary practice should be more influenced by the object of

missionary effort - *the nations.* The gathering of congregations which detaches Christians from their connection with the national life, and placed them in opposition to it, should be looked upon as a hindrance to the chief problem of missions - the Christianization of the nations'.[48] But this theology in its particular application to the question of caste had been impressively formulated nearly fifty years earlier by Dr. K. Graul of the Leipzig Mission.[49] Graul and his Society regarded caste as it exists among Hindus as more than a national and civil institution, and in as far as it is infected with Hinduism they believed that it 'is totally opposed to the word and spirit of the Gospel'.[50]Caste observances among Indian Christians, however, no longer have a 'heathenish superstitious basis' and caste among them has become not a religious, but a purely national institution. Missionary interference with caste observances among converts is on the whole ill-advised and bound on the long run to be ineffective; only when the missions become a fully-fledged 'national Church' will they be in a position to carry through any effective reform of the system. But if the Leipzig Society opposed interference with the institution of caste among Indian Christians, it still felt obliged to combat the caste *spirit,* which they regarded as the cause of all that remains wrong with the institution in a Christian context: the Society 'trusts that as soon as the Caste Spirit is expelled by the Spirit and in the way of the Spirit, all that is wrong with Caste will fall down as a "caput mortum."'[51] On such a basis the Lutherans dissented sharply from the practice of almost all the other Protestant missions, and controversy, at times very bitter, continued throughout much of the nineteenth century.

We are now in a position to turn to the Anglo-Saxon Protestant missions and examine the development of their thought on caste.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1 Most recently, and very impressively, by Louis Dumont in *Homo Hierarchicus.* London 1972, chapter 1. See also B.S.Cohn, 'Notes on the History of the Study of Indian Society and Culture', in Milton Singer & B.S.Cohn (eds.), *Structure and Change in Indian Society.* Chicago, 1968, pp.3-28; M.N.Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and other Essays.* Bombay, 1962.

2 J.H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine.* London, 1878, Chapter 1.

3 F.G. Bailey, ''Closed Social Stratification in India', *Archiv.europ.sociol, IV (1963) pp.107-124.*

4 See especially Louis Dumont, 'Caste, Racism & ''Stratification'': Reflections of a Social Anthropologist.' *Contributions to Indian Sociology,* No. 5, 1961, pp.20-43.

5 Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus,* p.35.

6 Jonathan Parry, 'Egalitarian Values in a Hierarchical Society.' *South Asian Review* 7/2 (Jan. 1974) p.109.

7 James Mill, article on 'Caste', Supplement to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. 2. part 1, 1816.*

8 R.Dahrendorf, 'On the Origin of Inequality among Men.' in A. Béteille (ed.), *Penguin Modern Sociology Readings: Social Inequality.* Harmondsworth, 1969, pp. 16-44. Cf. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus,* pp. 35-55.

9 For a singularly uncritical presentation of this view, see David Thomson (ed.), *Political Ideas.* Harmondsworth, 1969.

10 Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus,* p.41. It is also worth noting that Dumont fairly consistently uses the term hierarchy in preference to *in*equality.

11 *Rigveda* X.xc.12.

12 See especially the books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus. By way of comparison, see the Code of Manu in *Sacred Books of the East.* Oxford, 1886, vol.25, pp.301-2.

13 Luke 22.24-27 and parallels.

14 Ephesians 2.13-16, and Galatians 3.28, etc.

15 I Corinthians 12 etc.

16 David Edwards, in D.T. Jenkins, *Equality and Excellence.*London, 1961, p.198. Cf. J.A.T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology.* London, 1952.

17 Galatians 2. 11-14; Max Weber, *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism.* New York, 1958, pp.37-8.

18 John Plamenatz, 'Equality of Opportunity', cited in David L. Edwards, 'Equality as Part of our Heritage', in Daniel T. Jenkins, op.cit., p.181.

19 On this theme see especially A.O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being.*New York, 1960.

20 The best account of these movements is Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium.* London, 1970.
21 Jonathan Parry, op.cit.
22 See especially Stephen Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religions.* Bombay,1965.
23 L. Dumont, *Religion, Politics and History in India: Collected Papers in Indian Sociology.* Paris and the Hague, 1970, p.36.
24 Dumont, *Religion, Politics and History,* p.36; cf. Weber, op.cit., p.19: 'When a principled anti-caste sect recruits former members of various Hindu castes and tears them from the context of their former ritualistic duties, the caste responds by excommunicating all the sect's proselytes. Unless the sect is able to abolish the caste system altogether instead of simply tearing away some of its members, it becomes, from the standpoint of the caste system, a quasi-guest folk, a kind of confessional guest-community in an ambiguous position in the prevailing Hindu order. Further definition of the situation by the remaining Hindus depends upon the style of life elaborated in the new community'.
25 David Pocock, *Mind, Body and Wealth.* Oxford, 1973.
26 Ibid., p.158.
27 See chapter 5.
28 Imtiaz Ahmad (ed.), *Caste and Social Stratification among the Muslims.* Delhi, 1973; A.R. Momin, 'Muslim Caste: Theory and Practice'. *Economic and Political Weekly,* X/14 (1975), pp.580-582.
29 S.Strizower, *The Children of Israel: The Bene Israel of Bombay.* Oxford, 1971.
30 L.Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus,* pp.247-263
31 See C.J.Fuller's careful discussion of this question in his 'Kerala Christians and the Caste System'. *Man,* 1976 pp.53-70. He concludes that the Syrian sects should not be strictly regarded as castes or subcastes, although they do have a somewhat caste-like role in the village community.
32 C.B.Firth, *An Introduction to Indian Church History.* Madras, 1961, p.58.
33 Cited in C.F. Pascoe, *Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G.1701-1900.* London, 1901, p.541.
34 Vincent Cronin, *A Pearl to India.* London, 1966, pp.136-7. De Nobili himself was Italian, not Portuguese ('Parangi') by birth.
35 Letter of 1609, cited in Firth, op.cit., p.112.
36 Cronin, op.cit., p.138.
37 On this see Mgr. Amman, 'Rites Malabares', *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique,* t.ix - 2, 1927, columns 1704 - 46.
38 Amman, op.cit., 1732 (my translation).
39 Cf. Pope Gregory's Letter to Augustine of England on policies of accommodation: Bede, *A History of the English Church and People,* trans. Leo Shirley-Price. Harmondsworth, 1955, pp.86-7.

40 Joseph C. Houpert, S.J., *A South Indian Mission: The Madura Catholic Mission from 1535-1935.* New edn., Trichinopoly, 1937, p.257. The preceding arguments in this para. are also based on this work. On de Nobili, in addition to citations above, see S.Neill, *History of Christian Missions* pp.183 ff.; Dumont *Homo Hierarchicus,* p.250-1, 373; S.Rajamanickam, *The First Oriental Scholar.* Tirunelveli 1972; Roberto de Nobili, *Adaptation.* Palayamkottai, 1971; *On Indian Customs.* Palayamkottai, 1972.

41 For example, the volumes translated from 'High Dutch' by 'Mr. Philipps' and published in London: *An Account of the Religion, Manners and Learning of the People of Malabar in the East Indies, In Several Letters by some of the most learned men of that Country to the Danish Missionaries* (1717) and *Thirty-four Conferences between the Danish Missionaries and the Malabarian Brahmins (or Heathen Priests) in the East Indies* (1719); and *Propagation of the Gospel in the East: Being a Collection of Letters from the Protestant Missionaries and other worthy persons in the East Indies etc.* (1719).

42 For example, Louis Dumont's appreciative remarks on Ziegenbalg's work in his 'Definition structural d'un dieu populaire tamoul, Aiyanar, le Maitre', *Journal Asiatique* 1953, pp.255-70. Critics from the home churches were appalled at Ziegenbalg's sympathy for the Tamilians; he was curtly reminded that 'missionaries were sent out to exterminate heathenism, not to spread heathen nonsense all over Europe'. Cited in David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance.* California, 1969, p.52. The best discussion of Ziegenbalg's scholarly work is in Norvin Hein, 'Protestant Views of Hinduism, 1600-1825' pp.16-27 (typescript).

43 Philipps, 1717, p.8.

44 Ibid p.73.

45 *Propagation of the Gospel in the East,* p.58.

46 Other major sources for the history of the Tranquebar Mission are noted in the Bibliography.

47 On the connection between Pietism and Romanticism, see H.S. Reiss's Introduction to his *The Political Thought of the German Romantics, 1793-1815.* Oxford, 1955. The *locus classicus* for the romantic concept of the nation is Herder's 'The Nation as an Enlarged Family'. E.T. in Alfred Zimmern (ed.), *Modern Political Doctrines.* London, 1939. Other relevant writings, particularly by Novalis, Schleiermacher, and Renan are to be found in Reiss's and Zimmern's books.

48 Cited in George Smith, *Bishop Heber: Poet and Chief Missionary to the East, Second Lord Bishop of Calcutta.* London, 1895, p.316.

49 Karl F.L. Graul's two most important works on the caste question are: *Explanations Concerning the Principles of the Leipzig Missionary Society with regard to the Caste Question.* Madras, 1851; and *Die Stellung der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Mission in Leipzig zur Ostindischen Kastenfrage.* Leipzig, 1861.

50 Graul, *Explanations* ... pp.1-2.

51. Ibid p.3.

CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROTESTANT CONSENSUS ON CASTE, 1793 – 1850

(i) William Carey and the Early Bengal Missionaries

Until the arrival of John Thomas and William Carey, the first Baptist missionaries to India, there was, apart from the Lutherans in the South, no Protestant missionary presence in India. There were, to be sure, the chaplains of the East India Company, some of whom tended towards the evangelical persuasion, but few, if any, had more than a disjointed smattering of knowledge of Hindu society or religion; and the absence of any responsibility for work among the natives mitigated against the arousal of more than idle curiosity about the social customs of the land.[1] An increasing number of Company servants in the late eighteenth century were evangelicals, and many of them had far more immediate contact with Hindu society than did the chaplains whose normal sphere of operations was the presidency towns, the cantonments, and the European and Eurasian communities. Evangelical opinion on caste, however, tended to crystallize around the treatment of the question by the early British missionaries, for whom it was an inescapable problem of evangelistic strategy.

The early missionaries came from a very different social background from that of most of the Company's servants. William Carey, and most of his colleagues, were typical of the missionaries sent out by the English societies before 1860 in that they came from the class of 'skilled mechanics', artisans and tradesmen with an almost innate desire to better standards and a deep distrust of rigid hereditary hierarchies.[2] Those who had found the class system of England impeding again and again their attempts at self-help and improvement of their lot could hardly be expected to look with affection upon the rigid structure of caste, especially when they discovered that they, by virtue of being foreigners, were generally regarded as irremediably equivalent to pariahs, the lowest of the low. There is little doubt that missionary service was seen by some as an avenue of social mobility: the London Missionary Society required all its candidates between 1835 and 1861 to answer the question, 'Does the desire of improving your worldly circumstances enter into the motives of this application?'[3] But even if the societies were worried about the danger of men becoming missionaries for reasons

of temporal advantage, they were able to capitalize on the fact that a missionary career, for all its risks and hardships, did present to individuals from the artisan class a sphere of work infinitely broader, more intellectual, and more demanding that any conceivably open to them at home. If at the same time it offered them some recognized enhancement of status this meant, on the one hand, that 'the missionary movement ... was in part an expression of a far wider development - the social emancipation of the under-privileged class in this country'[4], and on the other hand it represented an export of this movement of emancipation. It need therefore cause no surprise if the early evangelical missionaries were predisposed to look askance at caste.

The interlinking of dissent and political radicalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is well-known and need not be elaborated here. Non-conformist evangelicals - as distinct from the Anglicans - had tended to hail with delight the coming of the French Revolution. The dissenting academies, unlike Oxford and Cambridge, were reckoned, not without cause, to be nurseries of radical and revolutionary thought. And a substantial reason for the East India Company's refusal to tolerate missionary activity was the suspicion that missionaries would not only disturb the religious equilibrium and threaten the social order with egalitarian notions, but were actually seditious, opposed to order and 'degree' whether it be that of Hindu India or that of the Company's rule. Which, in a sense, was fair enough. For even if the early missionaries were in fact far from being Jacobins, they usually preserved a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the Company's rule. Reluctantly tolerated by the government when it found it impossible any longer to exclude them, the missionaries tended to view the government as better than Hindu rule only in that it was more possible for the missionaries to bring effective pressure to bear on a British regime. They despised the government's nervous reluctance to assume a reforming role; they regarded as nothing short of apostasy any government support for specifically Hindu institutions or practices; and toleration they sometimes misrepresented as sponsorship. In a real sense the missionaries were political radicals, although perhaps not precisely as they were suspected of being. They sought a religious and social revolution which the Company believed would lead to the end of British rule, and beyond that to chaos; and to this end they attempted to press the government into policies it regarded as dangerous and undesirable. By and large the early missionaries were singularly unconcerned for the strength and stability of government,

for the maintenance of 'law and order', and this made them in official eyes the more dangerous revolutionaries.[5]

The early missionaries were individualists and their Gospel was highly tinged with individualism. They were 'inner-directed' men, to use David Riesman's typology, and their social aim, both in India and at home, was to create a society fit for individuals to live in. Their theology put a premium on individual conversion, and social structures which demanded spiritual and intellectual conformity and forced the individual always to act and think in terms of the group were anathema to them. Caste was pre-eminently such a social structure.

The dominant theology of English dissent was a qualified Calvinism, modified in particular by the belief that the propagation of the Gospel was not solely the work of God alone but was something in which Christians were called to co-operate, and by a gradual questioning of the concept of limited atonement. If the benefits of Christ's work were in principle available to all, the eternal destiny of millions depended on their appropriation through faith of these benefits. Thus the preaching of the Gospel to the heathen now became an urgent imperative for the Christian.

The early missionaries to Bengal were therefore predisposed to be antagonistic to the caste system. At first Carey and his colleagues appear to have been willing to tolerate a degree of caste distinction both in their schools and among their converts.[6] As far as the schools were concerned, the missionaries in Bengal simply continued the earlier practice in most of the indigenous schools of admitting pupils of various castes; where they differed was in introducing a greater element of competition into the schools and dividing them into classes purely in accordance with age or academic achievement. It is clear that Carey and his colleagues took some time before they understood that there was any fundamental distinction between caste and the class system with which they had been familiar in Europe. It was the Hindu assertion that maintenance of caste status was incompatible with conversion and the realization that it was caste rather than faith or intellectual conviction which restrained some from seeking baptism which led the missionaries to develop a critique of caste and a dual strategy for its overthrow: a running battle with the caste system as a whole in the belief that this was a central element in the total engagement with idolatry, and the complete exclusion of observances based on caste from the indigenous church.

The early missionary critique of caste was mainly carried out by the Serampore Baptists. They saw caste as 'a prison, far stronger than

any which the civil tyrannies of the world have erected; a prison which immures many innocent beings'[7] Caste denies man the possibility of self-improvement, and condemns him to uncritical acceptance of his lot. 'Caste', wrote Carey, 'has cut off all motives to inquiry and exertion, and made stupid contentment the habit of their lives'.[8] Caste thus stands firmly in the way not only of conversion, but of enlightment and progress as well. The one group that clearly benefitted from the system was the Brahmans. The missionaries believed they had a vested interest in maintaining both Hinduism and caste; an attack on the Brahman hegemony was therefore an attack on the whole interlocking complex. Even among the Brahmans, who held a virtual monopoly of higher learning, true intellectual life, the spirit of inquiry, criticism, and openness to new truth, had been stultified: the Brahman, according to Ward, 'had no ambition to enlarge the bounds of knowledge; he makes no experiments; it never enters his mind that he can exceed his forefather; to gain the smallest moiety of what they acquired is almost more than he hopes to realise'.[9] The caste system stood squarely as an obstacle to real community: 'They can scarcely be said to live in a state of society. They are as much separated from each other as from us', wrote John Fountain.[10] It was not simply the rigidity of Hindu society which offended the missionaries' egalitarian impulses, nor the fact that it made the ordinary social contact between Hindu and missionary which was a prerequisite of successful evangelism virtually impossible; it was the insurmountable barrier to ordinary acts of humanity between those of different caste which aroused the deepest sense of moral outrage. The missionaries may have been quite incapable of appreciating the emotional and material support which a *jathi* provided for its members in their horror at the moral effects of this kind of social segmentation, but their attitude was based not on simple individualism but on a notion of a caring community in which the individual had a considerable degree of liberty to follow the dictates of his conscience and develop his talents to the full in the service of his fellows.

Caste, the missionaries quickly concluded, was an integral part of Hinduism and indeed provided the most effective and powerful defence against the risk of conversion. 'All are bound to their present state by caste', wrote Carey, 'in breaking whose chains a man must endure to be renounced and abhorred by his wife, children and friends. Every tie that twines around the heart of a husband, father and neighbour must be torn and broken, ere a man can give himself to Christ'.[11]

The caste system being in itself a vicious institution which formed an integral part of 'the whole system of idolatry', and served to maintain that system in the face of every challenge and disturbance, the missionaries concluded that it was 'The most cursed invention of the devil that ever existed... the masterpiece of hell'.[12] Converts must accordingly renounce caste as a clear sign that they have indeed renounced idolatry. This abandonment of caste was at the same time an effective test of the convert's seriousness, a dramatic public declaration of conversion, and a protection against reversion to Hinduism.[13] To begin with it was indeed virtually impossible for a Hindu convert to be received back into Hinduism if he had in fact broken caste; it was only later that means were devised to restore converts who so wished to Hinduism and caste.[14] But the missionaries' motive in insisting on the breaking of caste was by no means merely tactical; they believed it to be entirely impossible to fulfill the ethical demands of Christian faith or to build up a true church if caste practices were maintained. It may well be that this 'hard line' substantially reduced the number of converts, but it certainly means that the general impact of Christian ethical ideas was greater in Bengal than it would have been otherwise, and perhaps this helps to explain why there were fewer controversies within the church on issues of caste in Bengal than in the south of India later in the nineteenth century.[15]

Carey and the other early Bengal missionaries' attitude to caste was very far from being a paradigm of their general approach to Indian culture and society. They believed that their attitude to caste was predicated upon the truth of the Christian ethic, but they were by no means anxious that their converts should be assimilated to western ways and manners, nor was their approach to Indian culture in general by any means negative and aggressive. 'The Baptists', writes Potts, 'did not encourage converts to adopt western trappings ... It was hoped that this would lessen the estrangement of Indian Christians from their countrymen ... Leonard told some Indians in Dacca that it was not his wish to have their profession of faith in Christianity alienate them from their own society: "No, we wish you to remain Hindoos, but to become Christian Hindoos, and to leave off the worship of idols and all sin, and to become holy men"'.[16] It is this sort of thing which enables Kopf to speak of Carey's 'flexibly accommodating' philosophy of mission, of 'the absence of a dogmatic spirit in Carey's policy of accommodating Christian values and practices within the indigenous civilization'.[17] But on the issue of caste, Carey and his colleagues were uncompromising. They saw

themselves as Christian missionaries rather than as agents of western cultural imperialism, and they had no desire to assimilate Indian culture to that of Europe – indeed, if anything, they were concerned rather with the sympathetic presentation of Indian culture to the western world. But their objections to caste were based, they believed, not upon the conventional wisdom of the West but upon the gospel; and here they were unyielding. Yet before long the rejection of caste pioneered by Carey and his companions became generally associated with an emphatically hostile attitude towards Indian culture as a whole, an attitude quite alien to the views which had developed at Serampore.

(ii) Alexander Duff and Educational Missions

From the beginning Protestant missions in India had been involved in education and had looked upon schools as instruments of evangelism. The Scots came relatively late to the scene – the first Indian mission of the Scottish Missionary Society was founded in 1823 and Alexander Duff went to Calcutta in 1829 – but they quickly established an extraordinary ascendancy in the area of missionary education, so that Duff effectively transformed the whole pattern, became himself a leading protagonist in the great Anglicist/Orientalist debate, and was recognized for decades as the authoritative spokesman, strategist, and apologist for missionary education. For our present purposes what concerns us most is the fact that the Scots were the first to use education explicitly as an invaluable weapon in the struggle against caste and to affirm that a liberal and Christian education could not recognize or tolerate caste observances within its walls. The Tranquebar missionaries had all along been somewhat ambivalent on the caste question and as far as their schools were concerned they could see no objection to recognition of certain caste rules. Other missions were inclined to heed the warning of Mountstuart Elphinstone that if caste were not recognized and tolerated in mission schools none but the pariah would attend,[18] and the usefulness of the schools as agencies of evangelism would accordingly be greatly circumscribed. The Baptists, while yielding to none in their hatred of caste, and insisting absolutely that every convert should renounce caste, did not see education as a major arena for this particular conflict. Only the Scots at first, with the distinctive emphasis which they brought with them to India – that learning, true godliness, and the equality of man are inseparable - saw education as both the primary technique of

mission,[19] and a weapon which could only maintain its integrity if turned relentlessly against caste.

The distinctive Scottish emphasis which made them the pacemakers, and Duff the theorist, of missionary education and which provided a new angle to the question of combatting caste did not, of course, arise out of the void. The motto, as it were, of the Scottish missionary enterprise was, 'The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea' (Isaiah 11.9), words to which William Robertson, historian, leading churchman, and Principal of Edinburgh University, referred in his sermon on missions in 1755. Robertson was one of the foremost figures of the Scottish Enlightenment, and although perhaps no over-ardent proponent of the missionary obligation, he seems to have favoured mission understood as a form of disseminating enlightenment and therefore indistinguishable from the spread and increase of true learning. It is of interest that Robertson diverged from the general opinion of the Scottish Enlightenment that competition, change, and mobility were signs of health in a society in his discussion of caste: the fact that India had in the caste system 'distinction of ranks' and 'separation of professions' is 'one of the most undoubted proofs of a society considerably advanced in its progress'. However, this suggests that 'The station of every individual is unalterably fixed; his destiny irrevocable; and the walk of life is marked out, from which he must never deviate. This line of separation is not only established by civil authority, but confirmed and sanctioned by religion...'[20] Robertson faces the objection that such an arrangement is 'adverse to improvement either in science or in arts; ... (and) tends to circumscribe the operations of the human mind within a narrower sphere than nature has allotted to them'. The system 'although extremely repugnant to the ideas which we, by being placed in a very different state of society, have formed', has its own virtues, in particular the excellence of Indian craftmanship and the 'abundance of the more common and useful commodities'. Robertson attributes to caste the changelessness of Indian institutions and customs.[21] Taken on its own terms and its own historical context, then, caste is the author of great goods – stability and abundance. But Robertson's discussion at the least implies that he is deeply suspicious of the *intellectual* consequences of caste. There is no real divergence here from Duff's later conviction that enlightenment could not spread apart from an onslaught on caste. Robertson provides on the one hand a highly critical account of popular Hinduism as 'superstition and false religion', in which he is distinguishable from

Duff not only by his more restrained language but by his very much more limited knowledge, and on the other hand a rather sympathetic description of the profundity of the insights of ancient Indian philosophy. But Robertson's crucial objection is that caste is the primary reason why this wisdom can neither be diffused nor increased. Duff does not share Robertson's respect for Hindu philosophy, but he agrees in seeing caste as the great obstacle to enlightenment.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century the Church of Scotland was divided into two camps – Moderates and Evangelicals. This distinction is no doubt relevant to some extent in the debate concerning the desirability of the Church engaging in overseas missions,[22] but once the decision was taken it became clear that it was warmly supported both by Moderates and by Evangelicals, and that the two parties were at one in asserting the rather distinctively Scottish priority to be given to education in the new enterprise.[23] If evangelism and the spread of enlightenment are at bottom the same, it followed on the premises of both parties, of William Robertson or John Inglis, the Moderates, no less than of Thomas Chalmers, the Evangelical leader, that caste must be questioned, exposed and undermined. Furthermore, this was congruent with the whole egalitarian strain in the Scottish intellectual tradition, which can be traced back to Knox's *First Book of Discipline* of 1560.[24]

While Alexander Duff clearly took with him to India a conviction that education — and the Gospel — must in the long term be accessible in principle to all without regard to wealth or status, caste was not at first a particularly pressing issue for him in Calcutta. The vast majority at least of those who pressed for entry to his new school were from the higher castes, and caste feeling was recognized to be already somewhat weaker in the metropolis of Calcutta than in the smaller towns of the *mofussil,* where he had indeed been directed to found his school. Duff took his place early in the ranks of the Anglicists and shared with them an elitist notion of education, in the sense that resources were to be concentrated initially on giving a thorough education in English to the minority capable of benefitting, in the expectation that these benefits would filter down throughout the society. The filtration theory involved commitment to a breaking down of caste and its replacement with a class system giving more place to competition and permitting a degree of social mobility. The old elite must, through education, be replaced with a new dynamic, and improving elite if India were to be reformed and the Indian 'renaissance' and 'reformation' were to become possible.

Earlier missionaries had done something to mix castes in their schools, to encourage competition, and to give recognition to merit rather than ascriptive status.[25] But it was the Anglicists, missionary and civilian, who made the onslaught on caste a basic educational principle which served as an important distinction between the new and the traditional educational institutions. C.E. Trevelyan, Duff's chief ally among the civilians, wrote: 'In all the new institutions the important principle has been established of admitting boys of every caste without distinction. A different practice prevailed in the old institutions; the Sanskrit colleges were appropriated to Brahmins; the Arabic colleges, with a few exceptions, to Mohammedans; and even at the Anglo-Indian institution which goes by the name of the Hindu College, none but Hindus of good caste were admitted. This practice was found to encourage the prejudice which it was meant to conciliate. The opposite practice has been attended with no inconvenience of any kind; Christian, Mohammedan and Hindu boys, of every shade of colour and variety of descent, may be seen standing side by side in the same class, engaged in the common pursuit of English literature, contending for the same honours, and forced to acknowledge the existence of superior merit in their comrades of the lowest as well as the highest caste. This is a great point gained. The artificial institution of caste cannot long survive the period when the youth of India, instead of being trained to observe it, shall be led by the daily habit of their lives to disregard it ... Habits of friendly communication will thus be established between all classes, they will insensibly become one people, and the process of enlightening our subjects will proceed simultaneously with that of uniting them among themselves'.[26] The new elite was to be open as the old had never been, and openness was the precondition for 'the progress of the human mind' and the development of a new and more inclusive sense of community. The products of the new schools would be, Trevelyan hoped, 'our schoolmasters, translators, authors ... the leaders of the people'.[27] Duff believed that they would also be the evangelists of India and the leaders of the Indian reformation. Both men considered that an essential preliminary to all these good ends was the elimination or substantial weakening of caste.

It is not hard to account for the elitist strain in Duff's educational thought. He had been sent out as a missionary to the 'respectable natives'. His initial inquiries confirmed two points: first, that 'all the pupils who frequented Bengali mission-schools were individuals of a very inferior grade in society, — individuals who had been in no perceptible degree affected by those changes which were insensibly

stealing into the higher circles, – individuals over whom caste and its prejudices still held absolute and undisputed dominion, – individuals imbued from infancy with the notion that it was an indignity to ancestors, an impiety against the gods to change the profession of the caste in which they were born, or aspire to anything beyond the humble heritage of their birth – in a word, individuals who, from the very circumstances in which they were placed, had no desire whatever, in whom no arguments, no inducements could create the desire to seek after, or cultivate any of the higher branches of tuition, whether of native or of foreign growth'.[28] In the second place, his initial survey of Calcutta revealed a widespread and intense desire for English education among the higher castes, people whom he judged to be in the urban environment more open to change and new ideas than those to whom missionaries had hitherto devoted their main attention.[29] Tactical considerations therefore made it desirable that the initial approach should concentrate on the higher castes, but the overall strategy made it imperative that from the beginning the principle that the schools were to be open to all was to be maintained. Duff reported in 1834 that of his pupils 'several... are the children of wealthy and influential men, a few the sons of parents in the lowest circumstances, but the majority are the children of persons, respectable though not affluent such as shopkeepers, sircars, writers in public offices, etc.'[30] The pupils were 'distributed into classes, *irrespectively of age or caste*'[31] and the school quickly faced attack for its failure to recognize caste. Almost all the pupils were withdrawn; Duff stood by his principles; and within a comparatively short space of time almost all the pupils had returned.[32] Other institutions founded on Duff's principles, such as John Anderson's school in Madras went through very similar crises on the same issue.[33] In offering the English education which was so eagerly desired, the missionaries held a trump card which enabled them to fight with considerable success the issue of principle. But, perhaps fortunately for them, to begin with very few low-caste pupils sought admission to the English schools, caste controversies were infrequent, and the 'Missionaries of the Church of Scotland' were enabled to pursue without undue disturbance their 'special commission to prosecute the only means within their reach, in the absence of miracles, towards rearing a superior race of *native* teachers and preachers of the everlasting Gospel'.[34]

The schools also had a more direct, if preparatory, evangelistic function, the undermining of Hinduism as a coherent and credible system, and it was because of this that the attack on caste allowed of

no compromise. Caste, Duff believed, was 'not a *civil* but a *sacred* institution'[35], its overthrow would be simultaneous with the destruction of idolatry: 'Idolatry and superstition are like the stones and brick of a huge fabric, and caste is the cement which pervades and closely binds the whole. Let us, then, undermine the common foundation, and both tremble at once, and form a common ruin'.[36] Even if viewed in isolation from its organic connection with idolatry, caste was seen as a great evil. Caste's 'cruel, anti-social, tyrannical dominion'[37] made it virtually impossible for the individual to improve or change his lot and – a reiteration of William Robertson's argument – forbade both the extension and the diffusion of knowledge. And it made impossible the emergence of a civil society in which charity and acts of common humanity bound together the whole into one community.

Duff was one of the most able and convincing apologists for the missionary onslaught on caste and it is arguable that the educational tradition that he set up did more than anything else to spark off the widespread questioning of caste so characteristic of modern India. His deficiencies of sympathetic insight and the rhetorical extravagance of some of his language have often served to obscure the penetration and balance of his analysis of Indian society and his passionate desire to share all that he felt to be true and good in his own heritage. He finds nothing good to say of caste, but in practice he was something of a gradualist in his attempts to deal with the problem. His primary concern was with pre-evangelism, with laying the groundwork for the future, but he saw the task, both in the long and the short term, as very much more than saving individuals from the *massa perditionis* of Hinduism. Through the closely interlinked processes of renaissance and reformation a new India, shaped by and responsive to, the Gospel would arise. And in that India there would be no place whatever for caste. It is this historical sense which makes him in so many ways a gradualist when compared with, say, Carey.

(iii) Changing Anglican Attitudes

Anglican missionary societies, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.) gave financial support to the Danish missions based on Tranquebar from soon after Ziegenbalg and Plutschau's arrival, and in the course of the eighteenth century a variety of factors led the Anglican societies to take a steadily increasing responsibility for these missions which were still almost entirely staffed by Germans in

Lutheran orders. The English societies were very slow, however, to involve themselves with the regulation of the local working of the missions and were apparently perfectly content until the early nineteenth century that their missionaries should remain in Lutheran orders and should continue to decide disciplinary issues affecting the native church on the spot. It is hardly surprising that the societies had no policy on caste: it was only toward the end of the century that any understanding of Indian society and religion became accessible in Europe and the possibility of an organic link between Hinduism and the caste system was recognized. When the Bengal Baptists and their sympathizers began to send back to England highly hostile accounts of caste and identified caste as one of the greatest obstacles to the spread of Christianity, something which must be totally and permanently set aside by every convert at his baptism, the Anglican societies were understandably anxious to discover the attitude of their own agents in the south. These missionaries had continued a tradition of tolerance, and reported in 1809 that 'From the commencement of the Mission on this coast, it has been the uniform practice of the missionaries to instruct the converts in the truth of Christianity; to insist upon their living a holy life and showing that they are Christians, by loving God above all things, by considering all men of whatever denomination as their neighbours; to entertain a hearty good will towards them, and to do them all the good in their power: but never did they insist on any person who wished to embrace Christianity renouncing his caste'.[38] The Society concluded that caste must be little, if anything, more than a religiously neutral ordering of society with which it would be inappropriate and injudicious for missionaries to interfere. 'The Society', they wrote to their missionaries, 'does not countenance the adherence of the Christian converts to any former religious restrictions, which are not consistent with their Christian liberty, yet it cannot be in the power or wish of the Society to abolish all distinctions of ranks and degrees in India; nor do they consider themselves entitled to do more than to remind the Christian converts, that with respect to spiritual privileges, there is in Jesus Christ neither bond nor free, neither high nor low; yet that such privileges are in no way incompatible with the various distinctions of rank and degrees in society which are recognised in the Gospel itself, where persons of several ranks and conditions receive, respectively, admonitions and counsel adapted to their state'.[39]

Thus in the early nineteenth century the churches of the north and of the south had adopted radically divergent attitudes towards caste, but in the north the Dissenters' attitude was fully shared by

evangelical chaplains and civilians. When an Indian episcopate was established based on Calcutta successive bishops found themselves both expected to enforce some kind of uniformity of discipline among all the churches under their jurisdiction and subjected to varied and strong pressure from Bengal to bring the southern churches into line. Bishop Heber conducted a visitation of the southern churches in 1826. These churches, which contained the major part of the native Christians under Heber's jurisdiction, presented him with a variety of problems. There was the difficulty that most of the missionaries were still in Lutheran, not Anglican orders. There were the insistent criticisms of the southern churches' attitude to caste; and connected with this was the accusation that the southern churches had become stagnant and corrupt, riven with internal conflicts and with a steady flow of reversions to Hinduism. Heber had discussed the state of the southern churches with various knowledgeable men before he left Calcutta, in particular with a south Indian clergyman, the Rev. Christian David, who had told him emphatically that caste was a civil rather than religious institution,[40] but a number of the younger missionaries were no less insistent on declaring that caste was an idolatrous abomination which must be rooted out of the church.

At the start of his visitation, Heber set up in Madras a committee of inquiry into the question and was himself tireless in canvassing opinions and collecting relevant material. But Heber's mind had already been made up before he left Calcutta: he regarded the missionaries who were demanding an immediate onslaught on caste as over-punctilious and he himself desired a policy of tolerance of any practice which could be regarded as civil or cultural rather than idolatrous. He was certainly correct in believing that some of the missionaries had become excessively aggressive and were devoting too much attention to the eradication of all sorts of customs such as the wearing of garlands of flowers at marriages, dancing, dramas and so on. 'Both parties', he wrote in a letter to his friend William Wynn, 'have evidently been to blame' and his role was, after ascertaining the facts, to resolve the issue 'without entrenching materially on what I conceive the natural liberty of the new convert, to live in all indifferent things in the manner which he himself prefers, and which his ancestors have preferred before him'. While he agreed that some of the claims of the caste Christians, such as separate cups at communion, could not possibly be allowed, he was emphatic that some of the missionaries had shown blameable contempt of the feelings of their flocks, and a sour and narrow hatred of everything like gaiety and amusement, when displayed under any other forms

than those to which they had been themselves accustomed.[41] Heber joined issue directly with certain missionaries, asking Mr. Schreyvogel what right he had to interfere with the 'private meals and social intercourse' of the native Christians and calling on him to defend on 'grounds of reason or Scripture' his objections to ceremonies used at marriages 'as going in procession through the streets, erecting a pandal, etc.' In inquiring how far caste as observed among Christians was a religious and how far a purely civil institution, Heber makes it clear that he felt it was no part of the Christian mission to attack Indian social structure and that caste observances – or at least many of them – ought properly to be tolerated within the church if the Christians themselves regarded caste as secular and adhered to caste in part 'out of the fear to lose the society and respect of their neighbours and relations'. 'God forbid', he wrote, 'that we should encourage or suffer any of our converts to go on in practices either anti-Christian or immoral; but... I have also some fears that recent missionaries have been more scrupulous in these matters than need requires, and than was thought fit by Schwartz and his companions. God forbid that we should wink at sin! But God forbid also that we should make the narrow gate of life narrower than Christ has made it, or deal less favourably with the prejudices of this people than St. Paul and the primitive Church dealt with the almost similar prejudices of the Jewish converts'.[42]

The storm centre of the caste controversy from about 1814 was Vepery, near Fort St. George, where C.T. Rhenius and L.P. Haubroe had antagonized a large proportion of the native Christians by their energetic measures against caste.[43] Word of Bishop Heber's inclinations leaked out although his untimely death in Trichinopoly before his commission had reported made any authoritative pronouncement on his part impossible. He had said enough, however, to strengthen the hands of the dissidents in Vepery, but not enough to dissuade the missionaries from continuing a vigorous attack on caste, which spread quickly to other Anglican missions in the south. There was — and is — considerable disagreement about the results of Heber's inquiry and of another unofficial plebiscite of missionaries organised by Rhenius: Richter reports that, since most missionaries 'were still guided by the traditions of the Danish Mission, the result was a large majority in favour of non-interference',[44] while Daniel Wilson's biographer claimed that virtually 'all are unanimously of opinion that if caste be retained, Christianity will be destroyed'.[45] However, we have the reply to Heber's inquiries from Kohlhoff and the other Tanjore

missionaries, which shows that they were still following the tolerant line associated with the name of Schwartz: 'Myself and several of my colleagues successively have endeavoured to act with similar caution and forebearance, at the same time seizing every opportunity to soften the mutual prejudices arising from distinction of caste, and bring our Christians by degrees into closer union with each other as brethren of our Lord and Master, Christ. And we have had the satisfaction to observe, that distinction of caste has, until of late, been seldom the object of controversy among Christians, and has gradually lost a great deal of its importance'. Most interestingly, the Tanjore missionaries argued that caste had existed as a purely civil institution before the coming of the Brahmans, who had made of it something sacred and immutable. Christianity destroys the sacredness as well as the rigidity of caste by cutting the link with Brahmanism. Brahmanical caste may be opposed to 'the very first principles of the Gospel', but caste among Christians is of a totally different order and must be dealt with gently and by degrees. Meanwhile a radical approach would render native priests and catechists 'entirely useless to the Mission' and would probably merely increase the evil.[46] Not only were the Tanjore missionaries gradualists but their statements about the link between caste and Brahmanism anticipate arguments which became fashionable more than a century later in the non-Brahman movement.[47] But the controversy simmered on. The churches, particularly those of Vepery, Trichinopoly and Tanjore, were full of dissensions, with large numbers relapsing to Hinduism or joining the Lutherans or Romans. Missionary opinion began to harden and consolidate against Bishop Heber's attitude, and for nearly a decade there was virtually no hope of a lead from Calcutta on account of long vacancies and the early deaths of two successive bishops.

Daniel Wilson was faced with the issue soon after his installation as Bishop of Calcutta in 1832. Wilson was a prominent Evangelical, much involved with the 'Clapham Sect' and a friend in particular of Charles Grant, Zachary Macaulay, and Wilberforce. The problem as initially presented to him was that the retention of caste customs among Christians provided a convenient bridge which increasing numbers were now using to return to their previous faith. This bridge must be broken down and the church purified if it were to survive. Even Thomas Macaulay reported that 'Swartz's people in the Tanjore' were 'a perfect scandal to the religion which they profess'.[48] Wilson promptly attempted to remove the scandal by an emphatic pastoral letter written in July 1833 in which he aligned himself with

the hard-liners: but his anti-caste feelings seem to have been shaped by the Evangelical pressure group with which he was associated in England.

'The unfavourable usages to which I refer arise' he wrote, 'from the distinction of castes. These castes are still retained; customs in the public worship of the Almighty God, and even in the approach to the altar of the Lord, are derived from them; the refusal of acts of common humanity often follow; processions at marriages, and other relics of heathenism, are at times preserved; marks on the countenance are sometimes borne; envy, hatred, pride, alienation of heart, are too much engendered; the discipline and subjection of the flock to its Shepherd are frequently violated; combinations to oppose the lawful and devout directions of the missionaries are formed: in short, under the name of Christianity, half the evils of Paganism are retained'. The opening salvo indicated the nature of the injunction which was to follow: 'The distinction of castes, then, must be abandoned, decidedly, immediately, finally; and those who profess to belong to Christ must give this proof of their having really "put off", concerning the former conversation, "the old, and having put on the new man", in Jesus Christ. The Gospel recognizes no distinctions such as those of castes, imposed by a heathen usage, bearing in some respects a supposed religious obligation, condemning those in the lower ranks to perpetual abasement, placing an immovable barrier against all general advance and improvement in society, cutting asunder the bonds of human fellowship on the one hand, and preventing those of Christian love on the other'. The remainder of the letter is principally devoted to drawing a distinction between caste and civil distinctions which 'the Gospel acknowledges and retains' because they are 'the natural result of differences of talents, industry, piety, station and success', and in laying down detailed rules to be enforced in all the churches under his jurisdiction.[49]

Wilson's letter aroused a veritable hurricane of unrest in the southern churches. In 1835 he visited the disturbed missions and faced the storm without budging an inch from his 'resolution of abolishing, wisely and kindly, but unalterably, the heathen usages of Caste from the Christian Churches'.[50] The dissident Christians attacked the Bishop particularly at his most vulnerable point — the claim that there was an absolute qualitative difference between European 'rank and degree' and Indian caste — and for his failure to admit as Heber had done that caste in its essence, or at least in many of its manifestations, was 'a civil rather than a religious matter'.

Wilson was diverging from the Government's line of non-interference with social and religious customs, and the Tanjore dissidents, well aware of this, appealed to the Government, and the matter was referred to London. The Court of Directors ruled that the whole issue was a subject for the ecclesiastical authorities, 'and as these authorities are fully aware of our positive orders for abstaining from any interference with the distinctions of Caste, we are content to leave the subject in their hands, trusting that they will not take any measures that are likely to require the aid of the civil authority'.[51]

Wilson by no means solved the caste question, nor did his position command universal support among Anglican missionaries. A number refused to implement his edict and some saw him as attempting to impose a discipline which was more natural to Dissenters than to the Church of England. Congregations throughout the South continued to be deeply divided on the issue and there was continual movement from the Anglican congregations into the Lutheran missions which were considerably more permissive on caste.[52] Yet among all the confusion there was a gradual consolidation of feeling and practice in the Anglican missions in favour of the 'Wilson line'. An inquiry sponsored by the Bishop of Madras and carried out by two missionaries, G.W. Mahon and A.R. Symonds, into the caste question in general and the still scandalous condition of the Vepery congregation in particular reported in October 1845 that 'The distinctions are unquestionably religious distinctions, originating in, and maintained by, the operation of Hindu idolatry' and denied any similarity with European ideas of rank. Caste is, they thought, utterly incompatible with 'the very principles of Christian morals'. They defended their negative approach as being based on a new and far more profound knowledge of Hinduism and Indian society than had been available to Bishop Heber and the early missionaries, and called for some definite plan for resolutely discountenancing or suppressing the continuance of it.[53] The Bishop of Madras and his clergy signed in 1848 a very strong statement on the evils of caste, which was commended by Daniel Wilson, now Metropolitan as well as Bishop of Calcutta.[54] In 1868 the Bishop of Madras published the replies of all the clergy in his diocese to a series of questions about the prevalence of caste prejudices and caste practices within the Church and steps being taken to combat them. The picture that emerges is still a somewhat complex one, with pockets of continuing and strong resistance to any steps against caste and a number of missionaries publicly arguing against carrying out the measures which had been enjoined upon

them. But the controversy is now markedly less bitter and intense and the general atmosphere is one of hope that the problem would not disturb the Church much longer.[55] Henceforth it is no longer easy to distinguish a specifically Anglican position from the general Protestant attitude, and the form taken by the problem is not markedly different from that in other Protestant denominations apart from the Leipzig Lutherans.

(iv) The Protestant Consensus

By the eighteen fifties virtually all the Protestant missions with the solitary exception of the Leipzig Mission were in agreement in holding that caste was a great evil that must be ruthlessly uprooted from the Church.[56] American Missions, mainly Calvinist and Lutheran, had early taken a strong stand against caste. In the American Madura Mission 'no distinctions of caste were allowed, and at first it was deemed a sufficient evidence that converts had renounced caste when they were willing to come out from among their friends, join themselves with foreigners, attend Church, sit down by the side of persons of lower castes, and partake with them of the bread and wine of communion. But caste, with its wonderful power of stooping to conquer, yielded these religious observances, and maintained itself as strongly as ever in other ways. It was entrenched in social customs and was impregnable in marriage relationships'.[57] In 1847 the Mission insisted that all employees should demonstrate their rejection of caste by taking part in 'love-feasts', eating with missionaries and Christians from various castes food usually prepared by a low-caste cook. The 'love-feasts' forced the issue and became a focus for dissension so that 'all the stations suffered from the dismissal of catechists and nearly all lost in the membership of their churches'.[58] Nevertheless the idea of such tests of renunciation of caste spread rapidly from mission to mission and became a common feature of church life until well on in the century in spite of the vigorous objections of a number of individual missionaries, Anglicans for the most part, and the disturbance which the meals often caused. Some missions imposed the test only on their paid agents, others, such as the North Arcot Mission of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of America, went further and ruled that 'any individual who does not cheerfully conform ... cannot become or continue a member of any of our Churches'.[59] In many cases further evidences of rejection of caste, such as the removal of caste-marks and the cutting off of the *kudumi,* or tuft of

hair, were required. American Lutheran missions and the Reformed Basel Mission in no way lagged behind in the onslaught on every manifestation of caste among Christians. The English Wesleyans largely followed the lead of the Anglican Missions.[60]

The development of the thought of Charles Meade, one of the first missionaries of the London Missionary Society, on the caste question, is instructive. Soon after his arrival in India he wrote in 1819 that 'caste is not such a serious obstacle as is frequently imagined. The renunciation of caste has been I think injudiciously and unreasonably demanded of everyone wishing to become a Christian. This supposes a man cannot be a true Christian unless he loses caste, than which nothing could be more futile. The propagation of this sentiment has prevented many from examining the Scriptures and from calmly listening to the *evidences* adduced in favour of Christianity. They dread the conclusion which they think must inevitably follow, that of losing caste'.[61] A year later, however, Meade launches a thoroughly non-theological attack on caste which questions one of the fundamental arguments in favour of the system which had been used by William Robertson and others: it ties each man to his ancestral trade or craft and this is both bad for the proper development of crafts and skills and obliges all craftsmen to take part in heathen ceremonies. Caste, Meade says, must be opposed in order to 'open the avenues of honourable industry to all'.[62] Meanwhile L.M.S. missionaries united to defend the interests of their converts, most of whom came from low-caste backgrounds, against the degradation imposed upon them by the higher castes and supported by the Maharajah of Travancore. In 1840 they were successful in persuading the Maharajah to exempt Christians from playing the roles traditional to their castes in heathen festivals, and in 1847 they joined with other Protestant missionaries in petitioning the Maharajah to emancipate the slave castes in his dominions.[63] By 1851 Meade had abandoned his initial attitude on the caste question and fallen into line: 'At the commencement of the Mission', he wrote 'it was thought that the Shanars might be allowed to retain their caste with the hope that they would be greatly enlightened and be induced to give up whatever was found to be contrary to Christianity in it. If the surrender of caste entirely had been required both here and in Tinnevelly at the beginning our numbers might and most probably would have been greatly diminished but we would not have had to witness what we now deplore'.[64]

Meade went further than the other missionaries in himself practising his egalitarian principles; he married an Indian Christian

of pariah origin, thereby scandalizing his colleagues who, for all their animosity against caste, seemed intent on maintaining strong racial barriers. Meade defended himself effectively, pointing out that the logic of the almost universal missionary attitude to caste should lead to the commendation, not condemnation, of his marriage.[65] It was left to the rather anti-British German Lutheran mission leader, Dr. Karl Graul, to point out of the English missionaries, that 'while intolerant of all native customs, their own behaviour to the Indians has all the worst features of the system of caste'.[66]

By 1850 almost all Protestant missionaries were agreed that caste within the Church was an unmitigated evil. Disagreements remained on two questions: what tactics should be used to deal with caste problems among Christians, and whether there was a specific Christian responsibility to launch a direct attack on the caste system as such. In the second half of the century a large measure of agreement was to be reached in favour of a hard line in dealing with the continuing problems relating to caste within the churches and in favour of Christians spearheading a general onslaught on caste, using every tool available – political pressure, education, publicity – and enlisting as allies all who would co-operate in the campaign, without regard to their religious affiliation. A resolution of the Madras Missionary Conference in 1848 had laid it down that only those who broke caste by eating food prepared by a pariah should be entitled to baptism.[67] But the consensus is best shown by the Minute of the Madras Missionary Conference of 1850 which was signed by nearly a hundred Protestant missionaries and supported by the Missionary Conferences of Calcutta and Bombay. This resolution justly claimed to represent the 'view of nearly all the Protestant Missionaries in Southern India' that caste in the Church was a grave scandal incapable of being defended on Christian grounds.

Caste, the missionaries believed, is 'one of the greatest obstacles to the progress of the Gospel in India'. It not only obstructs the evangelization of the Hindus but corrupts and enervates the 'Native Church' whenever it is tolerated among Christians. The hope of some that a gentle and gradualist policy would lead to caste melting away had been totally disappointed. Caste is much more than a merely civil distinction; 'whatever it may have been in its origin, it is now adopted as an essential part of the Hindu religion'. Furthermore it is in direct conflict with the Gospel belief that 'God has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth' (Acts 17:26) and that 'there is nothing unclean of itself' (Romans 14:14). For a Christian to refuse to receive and eat with a fellow Christian on

account of a difference of caste is a denial that 'In Christ Jesus, there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free' (Col. 3.11). In practice it has been demonstrated that tolerance of caste among Christians encourages pride and leads to the maintenance of 'an intercourse with the heathen, which is contrary to the plain Apostolic command, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord; and touch not the unclean thing"' (2 Cor. 6. 17). The missionaries seemed quite oblivious to the irony in their imposing on Indian Christians a total segregation from Hindu society which was itself closely analogous to caste barriers, even in that the difference is interpreted as a matter of purity and pollution! The Minute then proceeds to specify the discipline which it was agreed should be imposed: converts before baptism, and Native Christians before confirmation, should be required to renounce caste; vigorous teaching on the evils of caste was to take place; the 'love-feasts' alluded to earlier, which were so often the scene of much dissension and animosity, were recommended to all the missions for general adoption.[68]

Such were the terms of the consensus. Few Protestant missionaries save those of the Leipzig Mission dissented from the generally accepted line. The consensus did not bring peace to the churches; but the worst battles within the Protestant missions were now over and it was quite clear that the Gospel which Protestant missionaries would preach in India was emphatically egalitarian. The knowledge that they had a common mind on the caste issue and that they had made significant progress in setting their own houses in order made it possible for the Protestant missions to look outward, and make more concerted efforts to influence government policy and carry the attack on caste out of the arena of the church and into that of politics. The most dramatic instance of united political pressure on government to act on the caste issue was in the debates about the causes of the Revolt of 1857 and the policies to be pursued after the Revolt was quelled. To this we will now turn.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1 Norvin J. Hein, 'Protestant Views on Hinduism, 1600-1825' Unpublished typescript

2 On the social background of eighteenth and nineteenth century missionaries see M.A.C. Warren, *Social History and Christian Missions.* London, 1967, chap. 2; M.A. Laird, *Missionaries and Education in Bengal, 1793-1837.* Oxford, 1972, pp. 37-43.

3 M.A.C. Warren, op. cit., p. 52.

4 M.A.C. Warren, op. cit., p. 37.

5 Sydney Smith attacked the Baptist mission on the grounds of 'the danger of insurrection from the prosecution of the scheme, the utter unfitness of the persons employed in it, and the complete hopelessness of the attempt.' The missionaries he dismissed as 'the lowest of the people ... little detachments of maniacs' who were 'pernicious in their own country'. *Edinburgh Review,* Vol. XII (April 1808), pp. 151-181.

6 Kenneth Ingham, *Reformers in India, 1793-1833: An Account of the Work of Missionaries on Behalf of Social Reform.* Cambridge, 1956, p. 26; E. Daniel Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries in India, 1793-1833.* Cambridge, 1967, pp. 116-7; Laird, op. cit., pp. 115-8

7 *Friend of India,* v, May 1822, cited in Potts, op. cit., pp. 158 & 166.

8 Cited in S. Pearce Carey. *William Carey.* London, 1923, p. 166.

9 W. Ward, *A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos.* London, 1822, vol. ii, p. 500, cited in Laird, op. cit., p. 49. On Ward's work see Norvin Hein, op. cit., pp. 27-42.

10 Cited in Potts, op. cit., p. 158.

11 Cited in S. Pearce Carey, op. cit., p. 192.

12 John Fountain, cited in Potts, op. cit., p. 158.

13 See S. Pearce Carey, op. cit., pp. 195, 234, 238.

14 See M.M. Ali, *The Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities, 1833 - 1857.* Chittagong, 1965. Chap. iv.

15 Bishop Daniel Wilson in his 1833 Pastoral Letter 'On the Distinction of Castes' mentions that 'in Bengal no distinction of castes is known amongst the converts; it is renounced in the very first instance.' (Text in *Missionary Notices,* Vol. vii, No. 223 July, 1834, p. 495). This is not in fact an entirely accurate statement of the position: mission reports from Bengal do contain occasional references to caste difficulties, although they are few and not apparently too serious. See S.P.G. *Report* for 1867, pp. 101-2.

16 Potts, op. cit., p. 225.

17 David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance.* Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969, p. 80. Cf. pp. 51-54.

18 Cited in Ingham, op. cit., pp. 23-4.

19 It is not possible to maintain that before Duff the Scottish missionary attitude to education was in practice in any way distinctive. The earlier

Scots are cautious about involvement in education and sometimes complain that the work involved in running schools impedes their true work of preaching. See letter from Sec. of Scottish Missionary Society, dated 13.11.1822, Nat. Lib. of Scotland MSS. 8012; and letter dated 7.10.1829 from John Wilson (Bombay) N.L.S. MSS 8613.

20 William Robertson, *An Historical Disquisition concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India ... with an Appendix.* London 1791, pp. 258-9.

21 Robertson, op. cit. pp. 260-1.

22 See Laird, op. cit., pp. 194-200.

23 Laird, pp. 196-7, argues that the Moderate position that education and enlightment were a precondition of successful evangelism eventually convinced the Evangelicals. What Laird does not show is that the Evangelicals had ever opposed this notion; and it would indeed have been contrary to a major element in the whole Scottish tradition if they had. See D. Mackichan, *The Missionary Ideal in the Scottish Churches.* London, 1927, pp. 72-3, 111-114. The best account of the Scottish debates about the desirability of missions is Gavin White, ' "Highly Preposterous": Origins of Scottish Missions', in the *Scottish Church History Society Records.* XIX (1976) pp. 111-124. White points out that both parties agreed that a degree of education was a prerequisite for the reception of the Gospel. As one of the protagonists in the debate put it, 'Men must be polished and refined in their manners before they can be properly enlightened in religious truths. Philosophy and learning must in the nature of things take precedence.' Duff and his colleagues, of course, interpreted 'philosophy and learning' in entirely western terms and would not admit that Hindus could be 'polished and refined in their manners.'

24 *The First Book of Discipline,* chap. iv. On the Scottish educational tradition in general, see L.J. Saunders, *Scottish Democracy.* Edinburgh, 1950 and G.E. Davie, *The Democratic Intellect.* Edinburgh, 1961.

25 Laird, op. cit., pp. 115-6., 168.

26 C.E. Trevelyan, *On the Education of the People of India.* London 1838, p. 19.

27 Ibid., p. 48.

28 Alexander Duff, *India and India Missions.* 2nd edition, Edinburgh, 1840, p. 539. Duff's statement here was characteristically far too sweeping: See Laird, op. cit., pp. 174-5.

29 The report of Duff's initial survey, dated 23 August 1830, is in the National Library of Scotland, MS 7530.

30 Cited in Laird, op. cit., p. 221.

31 Duff, op. cit., p. 553.

32 Duff, op. cit., pp. 600-603.

33 On Madras see J. Braidwood, *True Yoke-fellows in the Mission Field: The Life and Labours of the Rev. John Anderson and the Rev. Robert*

Johnson. London, 1862, and A.B. Campbell, 'The Madras Mission of the Free Church of Scotland', in *Proceedings of the South Indian Missionary Conference, Ootacamund, 1958.* Madras, 1858, p. 37.

34 Duff, op. cit., p.xiii.

35 Ibid., p. 124.

36 Ibid., p. 616. Cf. William Campbell, *British India in its Relations to the Decline of Hindooism and the Progress of Christianity.* London, 1839, p. 90.

37 Ibid., p. 617.

38 Bateman, J., *The Life of the Rt. Rev. Daniel Wilson, D.D.* 2 vols., London, 1860, p. 428.

39 Ibid., pp. 428-9.

40 W. Taylor, *A Memoir of the First Century of the Earliest Protestant Mission at Madras.* Madras, 1847, p. 332.

41 Reginald Heber, *Journals and Correspondence.* 3rd edn. London, 1828, 3 vols. Vol. III, pp. 444-446.

42 The letter is in P. Percival, *Land of the Veda.* London, 1854, pp. 485-487 and parts are cited in Bateman, *Wilson* pp. 430-432, and George Smith, *Heber,* London, 1895, pp. 315 f.

43 Julius Richter, *A History of Missions in India.* Edinburgh, 1908, p. 168.

44 Richter, op. cit., p. 169.

45 Bateman, *Wilson,* p. 434-5. Cf. G.A. Oddie, 'The Protestant Missions, Caste and Social Change in India, 1850 - 1914', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review,* Vol. VI No. 3. Sept. 1969, p. 261.

46 Percival, op. cit., pp. 490-495.

47 See Eugene Irschick, *Politics and Social Change in South India.* Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969.

48 G.O. Trevelyan, *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay.* London, 1908, p. 272.

49 Wilson's letter is reprinted in full in *Missionary Notices.* Vol. VII No. 223, July, 1834, pp. 493-6, and in Bateman's *Wilson,* pp. 437-443.

50 S.P.G. Report, 1834-5, p. 39; Daniel Wilson (ed.), Bishop Wilson's *Journal Letters.* London, 1863, pp. 36-55.

51 Bateman, *Wilson,* p. 457.

52 The newly-established Leipzig Mission proved peculiarly attractive to Anglican dissidents. It sought to re-establish a Lutheran confessional presence in India, following the Tranquebar line on caste.

53 Percival, op. cit., pp. 503-507.

54 Percival, op. cit., p. 507.

55 *Inquiries made by the Bishop of Madras, Regarding the Removal of Caste Prejudices and practices in the Native Church of South India; together with the Replies of the Missionaries and Native Clergy sent thereto.* Madras, 1868.

56 Richter, op. cit., p. 173; Oddie, op. cit., p. 263.

57 John S. Chandler, *Seventy-five years in the Madura Mission.* Madura, n.d., p. 140.

58 Ibid., p. 144. Cf. *Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference, 1858,* p. 20.
59 *Proceedings of the 1858 Missionary Conference,* p.31.
60 Ibid., p. 29. Daniel Wilson's letter was printed, with evident approval, in the Wesleyan *Missionary Notices* in July, 1834, and Thomas Cryer, Wesleyan Missionary at Melnattam wrote in 1835: 'We were unanimously of opinion, that Caste is directly opposed to Christianity and that it must be met with the most resolute firmness – but on the account of the force of prejudice, with meekness and love'. Letter dated 7 July 1835 in Methodist Missionary Society Archives, Madras, Box IV, 1832-6. Cf. letter from John Guest, dated 12 Sept. 1836 and from Samuel Hardy, dated 6Oct.1836.
61 Letter dated 10 Aug. 1819, L.M.S. Archives. Box 1 – Travancore 1817 – 1831. Jacket B. This letter is cited in Ingham, op. cit., p. 27. The Enlightenment notion of conversion as primarily, if not exclusively, an intellectual change, should be noted.
62 Letter from Charles Meade dated 26 September 1820. L.M.S. Archives, Box 1, Travancore, Jacket C.
63 L.M.S. Archives Box 3 – Travancore, Folder 1, Jacket A: Letter from J. Abbs dated 26 Dec. 1840; Folder 4, Jacket E: Petition to the Maharajah and letter dated 1 June 1847.
64 L.M.S. Archives: Box 4 – Travancore, 1848-56, Folder 2, Jacket C. Letter dated 8 Oct. 1851.
65 Ibid.
66 *The Mission Field,* Vol. XV, 1870, p. 210.
67 Richter, op. cit., p. 170.
68 *Minute of the Madras Missionary Conference and other Documents on the Subject of Caste.* Madras, 1850. (British Museum Library 14170. c. 22).

CHAPTER III

THE REVOLT OF 1857 AND THE CASTE QUESTION

The Great Revolt transformed the whole atmosphere within which the caste question was discussed by underlining the centrality of the problem and the extreme urgency of finding the correct solution. Debates which had seemed in earlier years to be academic or 'theological' in the pejorative sense and to have little immediate political bearing were now seen to be crucial to the formulation of policies by which the British Raj might be destroyed or firmly established; little infringements of caste might lead to vast and bloody consequences; but to tolerate caste might well make impossible strong, efficient and honest government. Perhaps, some people suggested, the missionaries and their evangelical sympathisers in the army and the administration had so incensed Hindu opinion by their attacks on caste as an integral part of the religious system which they abominated that an outburst against a government which tolerated and perhaps encouraged such things had been inevitable. The rejoinder to such sentiments was to suggest that what the Revolt really demonstrated was the rottenness of Indian society, and the necessity for a very much more energetic policy of reform on the part of the government. The Protestant missions saw in the Revolt the providential hand of God, and felt called upon not only to show how these awful events had shown God's judgement upon a mercenary and pusillanimous government and revealed the depths of evil and violence which lay just below the surface in India, but to urge government to adopt an explicitly Christian stance, withdrawing any kind of support from Hindu or Muslim religious institutions or practices and discountenancing the observance of caste. Now, many missionaries believed, was the time to bring pressure on government to turn the soil and prepare the ground, if not to sow the seed and reap the harvest; now was the time to enforce in society as a whole the principles which had been applied at such pain and expense in the churches in the first half of the century.

'In considering the insurrection, I think that we should regard caste as the root of the whole matter', wrote Wylie of Calcutta[1]. Not everyone would go as far as this, although there was general agreement that caste was certainly a major factor in the genesis of the Revolt. Where opinions differed was on the question whether it was tolerance of caste, or disturbance of caste, which caused the trouble.

Many missionaries saw in the Revolt the inevitable outburst of conflict between Christianity and caste, which no official professions of neutrality could indefinitely postpone. The *Friend of India* took this line editorially: 'The Bombay Times recognizes in the present mutinies simply the commencement of the great battle between Christianity and caste. This battle has been impending ever since the English arrived in India, and those who admitted high brahmins into the army have elected as the battle ground the ranks of the army. They, not the missionaries, have converted the battle into Christianity versus the army ... The whole struggle is Christianity versus brahminism, not Christianity versus the inhabitants of India'.[2] But many people, particularly among officials, saw such opinions as colossal simplifications of a very complex situation, and simplifications which could be acutely dangerous if allowed to influence policy. Although in the heat of the moment many people did in fact interpret the Revolt as a war of religion – the mutiny memorials in a church such as St. James-within-the Kashmere-Gate in Old Delhi show how strongly this was felt at the time – soberer and more cautious voices were also to be heard, attributing the Mutiny to largely avoidable and unnecessary interference with the manners and consciences of the natives, and urging the wisdom of a policy of strict non-interference in the future.

Prior to 1857 Protestant missionaries had on the whole confined their assaults on caste within the confines of the churches. Even this had sometimes impressed a cautious government as likely to lead to unrest and disaffection. Missionaries and bishops found little official encouragement for their efforts to purge the churches of caste.[3] But if government did not give its support, there was little it could do to impede as long as it was a matter internal to the churches. Although matters of church discipline and the controversies leading up to the framing of a Protestant consensus against caste occupied much attention in the first half of the nineteenth century, there were also spasmodic attempts by missionaries to bring pressure on government to act against caste in a more general way. Most missionaries were concerned that converts from the lowest ranks of society should be enabled to escape from the disabilities and status which caste society had imposed upon them, and were willing to move the courts and petition government to this end. Increasingly missionaries came to feel that government was unsympathetic to native Christians, and too nervous about disturbing the caste system. They felt that while it would clearly be wrong and undesirable for government to induce conversions or even give explicit support to

missions, it should at least refrain from openly patronizing Hindu shrines and supporting caste. Caste and Hinduism were, they believed, two faces of the same coin, and while government should not inferfere with religious convictions, matters of social order were its unavoidable concern. If a social order offended against general canons of morality, as the missionaries believed caste did, the government was obliged to interfere. The mutiny had demonstrated the gravity of the threat to order and the stability of the Raj presented by 'those anti-social evils which are mainly attributable to caste distinctions'.[4] While preserving its proper religious neutrality, government may and indeed must proceed vigorously against caste in the name of order, morality, enlightenment, truth and progress. That such a policy, once implemented, would shake to its foundations what Alexander Duff called 'the gigantic system of Hindooism', of which caste was a principal element, did not alarm the missionaries. For one thing, they held that the Mutiny had demonstrated to the general satisfaction a fundamental incompatibility between the 'gigantic system' and continuing British rule; for another, they hoped that anything which broke up the great monolith, so long impregnable to their assaults, would open a new passage to the heart of India for the Christian Gospel. They understood themselves not as calling on government to do their work for them or enter into explicit alliance with them, but rather as reminding government that if it did its own proper task faithfully and well it could not avoid a prolonged and bitter war to the death with caste.

The incompatibility between caste and the continuance of the Raj was shown most convincingly, most missionaries believed, in the ranks of the native army. Most of them could not see in the events of 1857 more than a sepoy mutiny and although great lessons for the future of India might be drawn from this experience, for its immediate causes one need look no further than the composition and organization of the army. 'In all probability', wrote Wylie, 'there would have been no mutiny (and, if no mutiny, no insurrection') but for caste. That was the first pretext; *that* was the spot on which all intriguers placed their forces of mischief; and, beyond all controversy, it was the war-cry of caste that first effectually roused the native soldier to the required pitch of desperation'.[5] And caste, he goes on, cannot be tolerated in any army because it makes discipline impossible by teaching the soldier to consider his officer, if a foreigner or of lower caste than himself, his inferior. A writer in the *Calcutta Review* makes the same point: 'The primary cause of the Bengal mutiny has been the utter want of discipline and the spirit of

insubordination inseparable from the Brahminic caste system upheld in the Bengal army'.[6]

The mission societies, supported by evangelical opinion in Britain and India, used the revolt as the occasion for demanding a new 'Christian policy', although they were not always in agreement about what such a policy would involve. The Archbishop of Canterbury demanded, at a meeting of the Church Missionary Society in Exeter Hall in 1858, 'that Christianity shall be acknowledged by the Government, that our Missionaries shall have free course, that our converts shall be encouraged, not frowned upon'.[7] Henry Venn, the C.M.S. Secretary, announced that, 'during the fearful moments of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 all parties confessed their past negligences in respect of the religious welfare of India, and demanded a Christian policy in the future government'.[8] A society was formed in Edinburgh in 1857 dedicated to 'the Removal of all Government Countenance of Caste, connexion with Idolatry, and Opposition to the Profession and Promugation of Christianity' which published Occasional Papers, petitioned Parliament in favour of a 'Christian policy for India', and heard lectures on how caste not only impeded the progress of the Gospel but conflicted with the principle of equality before the law and obstructed the proper working of the courts in India.[9] 'A voice is heard' proclaimed the C.M.S. 'which, within the pale of the British Constitution, never speaks in vain, demanding for India a new and a Christian policy in the future Government'.[10]

But the voice spoke with an uncertain sound, as Christian opinion was deeply divided on what such 'a new and a Christian policy' might involve. At one extreme there were the hawks, who called for a joint onslaught on all things Hindu by church and state in close alliance. At the other end of the spectrum of opinion were those whose cautious requests for a realignment of policy hardly differed from the reaffirmation of governmental neutrality which was sought by most official opinion and demanded vociferously by some Hindus. The hawks interpreted the revolt as a holy war which had demonstrated the weakness as well as the true nature of Hinduism, and now called on government to take an active role not only in social reform but even in seconding evangelistic efforts. A tone of religious triumph, and an ugly call for measures which were called Christian but look more like vengeance, were not uncharacteristic of their statements. T. S. Burnell, an American missionary in Madurai, quoted the *Colombo Observer* with obvious approval in his 'Letter from India' of 4 September 1857: 'How can England strike a blow consistent with

her Christian character and moral dignity which shall strike terror into the whole population of the East? There is only one method of doing this — *to break the caste of every rebel before he is put to death'*.[11] Calls were heard for forcing convicts to break caste, and then send missionaries into the jails to preach to them. Burrell found to his annoyance that caste distinctions were observed in Paumban jail and reflected: 'It would seem that if there were any place where the bonds of caste might well be trampled underfoot, it were a prison where men are sent to be punished, not pampered'.[12] And government support for missions was justified by the belief that Hinduism, or even tolerance of Hinduism, could never provide a basis for order. Some writers come close to suggesting that Christianity should be officially imposed on India as a kind of punishment for the Revolt: 'Their abominable treachery and cruelty exhibited, moreover, in the eyes of the world, the real characteristics of their religions, and plainly showed that Christianity was a necessity for India if its inhabitants were ever to be elevated to the dignity and happiness of constitutional freedom, and that until they were regenerated by Christianity to some considerable extent they must be governed by the strong hand of power'.[13] The Mutiny, the hawks considered, marked the great turning-point of British rule in India. There could now be no looking back, no restoration of the mild and neutral government of the past; the course for which they pleaded as the only logical consequence of 1857 was a firm reimposition of the British yoke, now explicitly recognized to be Christian, and antagonistic to caste.

More moderate voices, too, were heard to question the wisdom of the policies of the East India Company before 1857, and in particular to ask whether the attitude towards social and religious change had not been ambiguous and calculated to lead to misunderstanding. Hindus, it was felt, suspected that neutrality was a facade, and the government deceitful. A little more that was explicitly Christian in government policy, without going to the punitive extremes advocated by the hawks, would in all probability serve to allay the suspicions of the Hindus, and would certainly ease the consciences of evangelical civilians who were eager publicly to support missions. *The Times,* in a leading article in 1858, came out strongly for what might be labelled a 'moderate Christian' policy: 'The Christian mind of England declares the religion of Christ shall be developed in all its entirety in India, no matter the millions whose prejudices it may shake ... It is the nation's will that India shall be governed

henceforth, not as compelling the heathen to believe, but, in strict accordance with the principles of Christ's religion ... The nation is prepared to see a Government of India which will secure to the native freedom from all attempts to coerce his conscience; but it will never again endure anything like direct or indirect patronage of those religious rites which are abhorrent to our every sense'.[14] And later, in July 1858, *The Times* expressed its opinion rather more specifically: 'The Sepoys were exposed to delusions on the subject of Christianity, because they had never been permitted to understand what Christianity really was. We are strongly disposed to believe that a bolder and more uncompromising policy than that traditionally maintained, will be conducive not only to our credit, but to our security. Nothing can be plainer than that the principles hitherto observed, whether of neutrality, or indifference or caution, have utterly failed to produce the results desired. The 'perfect neutrality' professed by the Company too often took the form of positive injustice to our own creed. The consequence was that the natives, never having learnt the true character of Christianity, invested it with a false character, and were ready to believe that Christians could make others Christian by the ridiculous devices which might involve loss of caste ... We have found it beyond the power of men to preserve Hindoos in a belief that Christians design nothing against their religion, while Christianity itself is kept out of sight'.[15]

The opponents of a policy of neutrality again and again pointed to the role played during the Revolt by Christians, both native Christians, whose freedom from caste scruples cemented their loyalty, and evangelical civilians and military men, whose transparent sincerity was said to be a reason why they were so successful in maintaining order and putting down disaffection. In Agra the native Christians took refuge in the fort along with the Europeans, and shared fully in its defence against the insurgents. The Rev. B. Geidt of Burdwan reported that 'It is a cause of great gratitude that our congregation sympathized with us during the late trying and sad times. Native Christians felt that they had common cause with us; being of the same faith, they must stand or fall with us'.[16] The Christians of Kishnagurh offered practical support to government: 'We native Christians in the Kishnagurh Districts, if called on, will be ready to aid the Government to the utmost of our power, both by bullock carts and men, or in any other way in which our services may be required, and that cheerfully, and without wages or remuneration'.[17] Again and again the theme is repeated in English sources: 'native Christians were the only natives who could be

trusted'.[18] It was also pointed out that the whole south, where there were numerically more Christians, remained peaceful, although it seems more than doubtful if the larger number of Christians provides any explanation at all of the aloofness of the South from the Revolt; and many people could remember the Vellore Mutiny of fifty years before, which proved that the South was not immune to insurrection when caste customs and religious scruples were tampered with. Missionary societies argued against neutrality on the grounds of 'the simple fact ... that during the late mutiny, those large military stations have escaped the best where the Governors were most zealous for Christianity',[19] citing Peshawar under Herbert Edwardes, Lahore under John Lawrence and Robert Montgomery, and Benares under F. Gubbins. 'What names', asked Henry Tucker of Benares 'have shone out most brilliantly during the past trying year? Who are the men confessed by England to have best done their duty? Are they not the Christian men of the stamp of Henry and John Lawrence, Havelock, Herbert Edwardes, and Montgomery?' And then Tucker goes on to draw the conclusion that those officers who were most openly evangelical had been most successful in their official duties; and that therefore the policy of neutrality, to which such men's behaviour was an embarrassment, was itself mistaken.[20]

Such evangelical government servants, civil or military, as took up a position in the debate tended towards a middle-of-the-road position, although they were by no means all in agreement with each other. Colonel H. B. Edwardes, the Commissioner of Peshawar, sought a thoroughgoing christianization of the Government of India by means of the removal of ten 'unchristian elements' which he believed adversely affected its operation and integrity as a Christian government. One of the most important of the 'unchristian elements' which he attacked was the official recognition of caste, and he suggested not only the withdrawal of such recognition but an officially sponsored onslaught on caste. His superior, Sir John Lawrence, while no less evangelical, was far more judicious, charitable and cautious, and his sentiments carried considerable weight with 'Christian opinion' in Britain. Lawrence was in favour of a more 'Christian' policy for India, but looked on some of the specific suggestions as to the form such a policy should take with horror, feeling that they were punitive and opportunist. An aggressively Christian policy on the part of the Government would, he was sure, lead to trouble, and it would certainly not assist the advancement of the Gospel. The key to his approach lay in his famous statement that 'Christian things done in a Christian way will

never ... alienate the heathen ... It is when unchristian things are done in the name of Christianity, or when Christian things are done in an unchristian way that mischief and danger are occasioned'.[21] There had been, Lawrence believed, a good deal of misunderstanding about government policy towards caste, and this aspect had been inflated unduly. A false assessment had led to various suggestions on what should be done by government *vis-à-vis* caste which Lawrence regarded as likely to lead to disaster. 'There appears to be an impression with a section of the public that the British Government had universally recognized caste, in a manner calculated to encourage and extend its baneful influences, and that the existence of caste may, in some degree, be dependent on such recognition. But the fact is, that, except in the Bengal army, the Government has not recognized caste in any especial manner; and that its recognition or negation does not materially affect this extraordinary institution'.[22] Caste cannot be ignored in recruiting for the army, Lawrence argues, but in the Bengal army enough attention has not in the past been paid to ensuring that there should be a proper balance of castes within the ranks, and consequently there has been an undue dominance of Brahmans. The policy of excluding Christians from the army should be reversed. Montgomery in the Punjab went further, and urged a total disregard of caste considerations in recruitment both to the army and to administrative posts: 'The system of caste can no longer be permitted to rule in our services. Soldiers, and Government servants of every class, must be entertained for their merits, irrespective of creed, class or caste. The native Christians, as a body, have, with some exceptions, been set aside ... I consider I should be wanting in my duty at this crisis if I did not endeavour to secure a portion of the numerous appointments in the judicial department for native Christians'.[23]

Occasional attempts were made to separate the caste issue from the religious one. Rejecting out of hand the virtually unanimous opinion of Protestant missionaries that caste and Hinduism were inextricably interlocked, it was occasionally suggested that what really disturbed the Hindus was not tampering with their religion, but any attempt at interference with caste. If missionaries were willing to confine themselves to the religious realm, narrowly defined, then no trouble would be likely to ensure. A member of a deputation from various missionary societies to Lord Stanley, the President of the Board of Control, in August 1858, put it thus: 'The difference between the religion and the caste of the Hindoos was like that between the religious creed of an English gentleman and his code of honour; and

that just as an English gentleman would resent any attack on his honour, and yet leave persons perfectly at liberty to attack his religion, so did the Hindoo feel with respect to his caste and religion ... The natives would strongly deprecate any interference with their caste, but were open to instruction and persuasion in religion, provided everything were done openly'.[24] A not dissimilar position was presented by the anonymous author of a pamphlet entitled *The Thoughts of a Native of Northern India on the Rebellion.*[25] Proselytizing in itself, the author argued, would arouse no general antagonism as distinct from ridicule, even if vigorously supported by government. 'But', the writer goes on, 'take care you do not interfere with their caste, you do not force them to eat food cooked by another in their jails; or thrust grease down their throats with the cartridges made by Europeans'.[26] Acts such as these have nothing to do with Christianity. Caste is a social evil which will decay and disappear in time, but 'to try to exterminate it now must end in bloodshed.'[27] The real cause of the Revolt had little or nothing to do with caste or religion; rather it was 'the reluctance of the English to mix with the natives on equal or social terms.'[28] The missionaries as a whole would not accept such arguments because they would not restrict the sphere of their operations so narrowly, did not (any more than most Hindus) see caste and religion as distinct, and were blind to the behavioural inconsistency with their principles pointed out by 'a Native of Northern India' in the previous sentence.

Moderate missionary opinion pressed for toleration rather than governmental neutrality. The older policy of neutrality had not in practice worked, they claimed. Again and again, the missionaries argued, government had shown itself favourable to Hinduism, a 'wet-nurse to Vishnu', and positively opposed to missionary activity. Government money still flowed to some of the temples and mosques (that it also went to support the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment was not often acknowledged); occasions when European officials had been present at Hindu festivals and ceremonies were jealously noted; missionaries were excluded from working among sepoys, and there had been cases when converted sepoys had been suspended from their duties and removed from their regiments; civilians and military men who supported missions were often under suspicion or even disciplined. But if missionaries and evangelicals believed that neutrality in practice meant that the government took sides against them, they also argued that it nourished strong suspicions among Hindus and Muslims that government was using a policy of neutrality as a cloak for an officially sponsored proselytizing. And

such suspicions were strengthened by the fact that government, on grounds of equity and morality rather than Christian conviction, had been obliged to institute certain reforms which Hindus sometimes regarded as religious interference – the abolition of *suttee*, the refusal to recognize the privileged status of the Brahman in courts of law, the *lex loci* of 1850 whereby converts were permitted to retain rights of inheritance, irrigation projects using the water of the sacred Ganges, and so forth. Other implications of the policy of neutrality had been interpreted as signs of weakness, and thereby played their part in causing the Revolt. Neutrality, evangelicals argued, destroys the integrity of government: 'A neutral policy between the true and false religions is impossible, and the profession of it dishonours God and is inimical to the social welfare of the Natives.'[29] The policy which the missionaries sought from government was, in religious matters, strict toleration on an equal basis. They believed that government should not attempt to coerce the consciences of its Indian subjects, nor directly assist the proselytizing efforts of missionary societies any more than it should support Hindu temples. Tolerance apparently could include various indirect forms of government support for missions, grants-in-aid for mission schools, and the teaching of the Bible in government schools and colleges. On social and moral questions, government should not hesitate to follow the rules of Christian ethics. The Church Missionary Society's *Memorial to the Queen* put it this way: 'The Government of India has professed to occupy a position of neutrality between the Christian and false religions. Such profession, your Memorialists believe, dishonours the truth of God, discourages the progress of Christianity, and is inimical to the social welfare of the Natives. Especially they conceive it to be inconsistent with a right discharge of the duties of Government in endeavouring to repress those anti-social evils which are mainly attributable to caste distinction, public indecency in idolatrous rites, and generally to a false standard of morality – evils which have been fearfully exhibited amidst the revolting cruelties of the present rebellion, and which can only be effectually conteracted by *recognizing the Christian religion as the basis of law and social order.*'[30]

The most careful and detailed statement of a moderate missionary view on caste as a cause of the Mutiny, and the policies which government should adopt for the future was that of Alexander Duff, who published in 1858 his letters written during the turmoils of 1857 as *The Indian Rebellion: its Causes and Results,*[31] and another work which goes more carefully into the question of caste: *What is Caste?*

How is a Christian Government to deal with it?[32] Duff reaffirms his earlier position, that caste is both civil and religious. Although it is quite impossible to draw a precise frontier between the civil and the religious elements of caste, the two faces of caste make it inevitably the concern both of the state and of missions. The specifically religious objections to caste are too obvious, Duff believes, to require repeating; instead he develops the civil or secular objections. Caste is opposed to progress, enlightenment, intellectual liberty, patriotism and charity. 'Has not caste', he asks, 'tended in all ages, under all changes of dynasty, and amid circumstances the most diverse, to cramp and paralyse the vigour of the mental faculties – to retard, if not wholly obstruct, the progress of civilization – to arrest and freeze up the genial current of benevolent feeling and saturate the whole soul with an isolating accursed selfishness – to extinguish every spark of true patriotism, and quench all zeal in the promotion of joint enterprises of public utility?'[33] The power of caste depends absolutely on the strange resilience of the caste spirit, which can survive undamaged the most varied outward changes. It is this fact which puts a limit on what government is able to do to combat caste: political and legal action can do no more than affect outward behaviour, whereas the real battle is in the hearts of men. Duff in effect suggests a kind of alliance of Church and State to do battle with caste, which is condemned before each, for rather different reasons. He does not advocate 'an exterminating crusade' on the part of the secular power, but simply the 'one consistent and practicable line of action' for a Christian Government: 'solemnly resolving to have nothing whatever to do with caste, to wash our hands in innocency concerning it, and in every possible way, simply to ignore its existence altogether'.[34] Such a policy 'obviously involves no violence to religious scruples, no restraint on liberty of conscience.'[35] In practical terms, government would ensure that all appointments were on merit alone without any reference to caste, and that caste scruples would not be accepted as an excuse for failure to perform any official duties. Caste should be 'officially ignored' in jails, thus making imprisonment 'an object of real terror' and undercutting the assumption, fostered by caste, that good character goes with high-caste status independently of the morality of one's actions.[36] But measures such as these will do nothing to destroy the animating core of caste: 'What can exorcise its demon-spirit? Nothing, nothing, but the mighty power of the Spirit of God – quickening, renewing, sanctifying the whole Hindu soul.'[37] And when the joint endeavours of church and state have undercut caste and the whole Hindu system,

then 'The anti-social tyrannous dominion of caste will be resented, abhorred, and trampled underfoot with an indignation not lessened by the reflection that, over ages and generations without number, it hath already swayed undisturbed the sceptre of a ruthless despotism, which ground men down to the condition of irrationals, and strove to keep them there with the rigour of a merciless necessity.'[38]

Duff's arguments were conclusive for much of missionary opinion, and not without their influence in political circles. Some missionaries accepted the outlines of Duff's position, but went rather further. The Rev. E. J. Hardey, in a paper on 'Hindu Caste' which won the approval of the South India Missionary Conference meeting in Ootacamund in April 1858, spoke of 'Five Blows' against caste which it was the responsibility of government to strike. His 'First Blow' involved the confiscation of 'the Enam lands of the Brahmins' – in other words, the appropriation of the major part of the endowments of Hindu temples and other religious institutions. The other 'Blows' involved the 'utter disavowal' of caste by government, the free admission of native Christians into government employment, the abolition of caste distinctions in jails, the raising of 'the Pariah and the Chuckler from their degradation' – although it was not made clear how this last was to be achieved. Perhaps the missionaries expected to have a share in striking some of these blows. Certainly the *coup de grâce* was their particular concern: 'Nothing short of the mighty power of the Holy Ghost renewing the entire nature of the Hindu, can eradicate this monster evil.'[39]

The dominant official view may well be represented by H. M. Parker's dedication of his book on *Caste and Conversion:* 'To that devout, earnest and conscientious body of Englishmen, whose fervent zeal for Conversion has clearly helped to create a fearful Mutiny, and will probably excite a National Rebellion in India, thereby throwing back to the sacred cause of Christianity in that country for centuries.'[40] Sir George Clerk believed it 'an absolute waste of time to seek for other causes of the prevailing disaffection in India than a dispassionate observer may discover in various measures offending the natives' customs and feelings.'[41] Lord Ellenborough thought that the primary cause of trouble was grants-in-aid to mission schools: 'No measure', he remarked, 'could be adopted more calculated to tranquillize the native mind and to restore to us their confidence than withholding government aid from schools with which missionaries are associated.'[42] Not only would it be suicide for British India if the government gave way to the pressure from the missionary societies and the evangelicals which we have discussed

and outlined above, but the only way forward was to enforce a strict and total separation between the missions and the government such that government servants had no dealings with missionary societies, and missions could expect no favours from government. Lord Ellenborough and other peers were horrified by reports that the Governor-General, Lord Canning, had contributed from his private purse to a missionary society, and the government stated in the House of Lords in June 1857, that 'If Lord Canning had so acted as to give countenance to such a belief as the noble Earl inferred, he would no longer deserve to be continued in his office.'[43] Not a 'Christian policy' but a resolute reaffirmation of the old principle of neutrality and its effective enforcement would restore stability to India and ensure the future of the Raj by winning the hearts of the people.

The attempts to proclaim that the meddlesome activities of the missionaries in matters which were, for the most part, beyond their province, had caused the Revolt did not carry much conviction. Frequent references were made to isolated outbursts against missionaries or native Christians, such as the riots in Tinnevelly in 1858 arising from attempts to carry the corpse of a Christian convert along a street traditionally closed to members of the dead man's former caste.[44] But such instances were few, and mostly came from the South. Far more significant was the pressure on Government not to give way to organized Hindu opinion on the question of neutrality. A crowded meeting in Madras, chaired by 'the High Priest of Conjevaram Pagoda', sent a strong Memorial to Lord Stanley, the Secretary of State for India. The Memorial saw abundant evidence of pressure on government to lend its patronage to attacks on Indian religion and the caste system, and resented the association of government officials, including chaplains and bishops, with this pressure. They agreed with the missionaries that if caste were destroyed, Hindu religion would fall also, and while protesting against the activities of missionaries and evangelical government servants, they firmly expressed their 'unwavering and trusting dependence upon the strong, definite and unmistakable engagements which Her Majesty's Ministers are bound to fulfil towards the people of India and their national religions.'[45] Similarly, and rather earlier, 'a Hindu of Bengal' writing (perhaps wisely) anonymously, laid the blame for the Revolt on a century of misrule, but more specifically attacked the faulty application of the policy of neutrality: 'The Governor-General told the people in a proclamation issued in the beginning of the outbreak that "the Government never did and never will interfere with the religion of the natives." With regard to the first

assertion, all India have silently replied to his Lordship that it is a lie: and they are right. With regard to the second they say, "What guarantee is there that Government will not interfere with their religious practices since it has never scrupled to break its faith and falsify its promises and professions.'"[46]

The debate on the relation of caste to the Mutiny attracted the attention of no less a pundit than the already very distinguished young Oxford Indologist, Max Müller, whose essay on 'Caste' of 1858 was a careful attempt to clarify the terms of the discussion.[47] Müller recognized that considerable obfuscation had arisen from confusion about the meaning of caste – a term which was already being used in a bewildering variety of senses – and the relation between caste and religion. The scholar's role in such a situation was to clarify the issue and ensure that terms were being used correctly; only on such a basis could reasonable policies which were for the good of India be evolved. The question of caste had now become too serious a matter to be treated as vaguely as it has been in the past; recent findings by the Indologists had considerable bearing on the matters at issue; and acceptable policies in regard to caste depended on a more precise and profound understanding such as could now be provided.[48]

Müller first deals with the question whether caste is a religious or a civil institution. If it were indeed religious, government could not and should not interfere with it, and Müller emphatically dissociates himself from those missionaries who advocated an attack on caste as a kind of retribution for the Revolt, and hoped thereby to inflict a mortal wound on Hinduism. Violence must not be done to the Hindu's religious feelings, and if caste is essentially religious it must be respected as such by a government which recognized that political interference in religious matters can be productive of nothing but harm.[49] But is caste in fact a religious institution? Müller knows well that Hindus range themselves on both sides of the question, and that most missionaries believed caste to be essentially religious; in such a situation we must seek our own answer. In doing so, Müller starts from the typically idealist (and Protestant) assumption that the essence of a religion is to be found in its origins, and this essence is to be clearly distinguished from the later accretions, many of which adulterated the purity of the original system. Indeed Müller's admiration for Hinduism in its pure, Vedic origins, is only excelled by his contempt for contemporary popular Hinduism, which he believed had lost contact with its roots and degenerated into becoming 'a decrepit religion' which 'has not many years to live.'[50]

The Hindus themselves, Müller believed, accept that the highest religious authority must be accorded to the oldest strand in their tradition, that enshrined in the Vedas; but in the Vedas caste as described in the Code of Manu, or as practised at the present time, is not at all to be found: 'There is no authority whatever in the hymns of the Vedas for the complicated system of castes; no authority for the offensive privileges claimed by the Brahmans; no authority for the degraded position of the Sudras. There is no law to prohibit the different classes of people from living together, from eating and drinking together; no law to prohibit the marriage of people belonging to different castes; no law to brand the offspring of such marriages with an indelible stigma.'[51] Thus it follows that 'it is not difficult to prove to the natives of India that, whatever their caste may be, caste, as now understood, is not a Vedic institution, and that in disregarding the rules of caste, no command of the real Veda is violated. Caste in India is a human law, a law fixed by those who were most benefitted from it themselves. It may be a venerable custom, but it has no authority in the hymns of the Rishis.'[52] Such an argument is not new: K. M. Banerjea made many of Müller's principal points in his 'Essay on Hindu Caste', published in 1851 and discussed in chapter six of the present work. Similarly John Wilson, the Scottish missionary in Bombay, had written in 1857 that caste 'had no existence at the time the oldest Veddik hymns were composed about fifteen hundred years before the Christian era; for the Brahmans then constituted a profession, and not a hereditary and exclusive caste, while other divisions in the Hindu social community were unknown in the same relationship.'[53]

Two practical consequences follow from Müller's demonstration that caste as it is known in modern times is no part of original Hinduism, but rather a later development which has no integral link with original, and therefore, genuine Hinduism. In the first place, the missionaries should realise that if their attacks on caste are intended as attacks on the essence of Hinduism they are misdirected. It would be a more profitable strategy for them to demonstrate gently that caste, and much else, is not a genuine Hindu institution and consequently is open to criticism and reform. This could well form part of a policy of encouraging a process not dissimilar to the Reformation in Europe by helping Hindus to return to the purity of Vedic religion, which would be advantageous to Christianity, for 'a Hindu who believes only in the Veda would be much nearer to Christianity than those who follow the Puranas and Tantras.'[54] Furthermore such a breaking of the link between caste as a

contemporary social form and Hinduism would render it at the same time 'capable of change and growth',[55] and *religiously* unexceptionable. The direct and uncompromising attack by missionaries on caste had resulted in converts who were not numerous but socially *deraciné,* and had it been more successful it would have resulted in total social dislocation. 'Caste cannot be abolished in India,' he writes, 'and to attempt it would be one of the most hazardous operations that was ever performed on a living political body. As a religious institution caste will die; as a social institution it will live and improve.'[56] As a true romantic, Müller is reluctant to disturb a living social organism. He is unmoved by the ethical objections to caste proffered by the missionaries, and unconvinced that there is a radical difference between caste and class. He urges upon the missionaries a modification of their radically egalitarian line.

The second consequence that follows from the demonstration that caste is not a religious institution is that governmental interference with caste would in no way infringe a proper policy of religious neutrality. But it is expedient for government to recognize that caste has its advantages, is capable of change, and cannot be abolished by legislative *fiat.* Government should, Müller argues, protect subjects against indignities arising from caste observances, should not recognize caste in its dealings with the natives, and should ignore it in all public institutions.[57]

Whether Müller's practical proposals really follow from his premises, in particular his distinction between 'essential Hinduism' and its degenerate contemporary manifestations, is an open question. He seems hardly to have grasped how pressing the matter appeared to be at the time. But his advocacy of a gradualist policy could well stand on its own without reference to his theories about the Vedas, and it was not without its influence. As a final commendation of a less aggressive policy on caste to the missionaries he turns prophet: 'Caste, which has hitherto proved an impediment to the conversion of the Hindus, may in future become one of the most powerful engines for the conversion not merely of individuals, but of whole classes of Indian society.'[58] This prophecy, as we shall see in the next chapter, was to find a degree of fulfilment, but not quite as Müller expected, for it was not a mild and tolerant attitude towards caste but a vigorously presented egalitarian rejection of caste which was to attract to the missions multitudes of converts from the ranks of the Untouchables who came, it is true, not as individuals but as caste groups.

A royal proclamation marks the conclusion of the debate with which we are in this chapter concerned, promulgated by Queen Victoria as she became Empress of India. Although the tone of the proclamation is pious and indeed Christian, invoking 'the blessing of Almighty God' on the new arrangements for the political control of India, and announcing that the Queen-Empress herself relied 'firmly ... on the truth of Christianity', and acknowledges 'with gratitude the solace of religion', there really were no significant concessions to missionary and evangelical pressure, except, perhaps, in a statement that government posts should be open to all without regard to creed or, by implication caste: 'And it is our will that, as far as may be, our subjects, of whatever race or creed, be freely and impartially admitted to offices in our service, the duties of which they may be qualified, by their education, ability, and integrity, duly to discharge'.[59] For the rest, the part of the proclamation which referred to religious and social matters was a firm reassertion of the principle of neutrality: 'We disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose our convictions on any of our subjects. We declare it to be our royal will and pleasure that none be in anywise favoured, none molested or disquieted, by reason of their religious faith or observances, but that all shall alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the law; and we do strictly charge and enjoin all those who may be in authority under us that they abstain from all interference with the religious belief or worship of any of our subjects, on pain of our highest displeasure'.[60]

The proclamation was certainly understood by many in India as a defeat for the missionary and evangelical interest. Particularly in the South there were violent outbursts against Christian converts which, in the view of the C.M.S., 'arose from a sad misconception of the Proclamation of our gracious Queen.'[61] Robert Caldwell wrote from Edeyengoody that the proclamation was 'almost universally interpreted by the natives in favour of custom and caste against proselytism in every shape. The purpose of it is supposed to be – Christianity for the Queen and the English alone, Hindooism for the Hindoos.'[62] In a number of places the proclamation was seen as an indication that government would positively support caste rules, and high castes used it as a justification for intimidation of the lower castes and Christian converts.[63]

On the face of it, it appeared that the attempt on the part of the missionaries in alliance with evangelical opinion in Britain and in India to force the government into a more 'Christian' policy which would discountenance caste had been a total failure. The wording of

the Proclamation may have been slightly ambiguous and offered a few morsels, but nothing more, to missionary feeling. The new Government of India was unbelievably cautious for many years in taking any action which might smack of interference with established social customs or religious practices. Initially missionaries were firmly put in their place both by officialdom and by high-caste and orthodox Hindu feeling. But although the missionaries did not achieve any of their stated objectives and were rightly disappointed, they were in many ways in a stronger position after the Revolt and the consequent rearrangement of the government than before. The new government was in some ways more accessible than the old to evangelical and missionary opinion, and the missionary interest in Britain became organized as never before. The missionaries' trumpet blast against caste continued to be heard loud and clear, although the walls of Jericho did not yet fall. Public opinion in India as well as in Britain now knew that many people considered caste to be more than a minor blemish in the life of some of the churches of India, for the missionaries had loudly declared it to be a malignant and immoral growth which had led directly to the Revolt and would, if tolerated much longer, make any prospects of progress or enlightenment fade into nothing. Such an assessment of caste worked slowly, but the position of the missionaries in the debate about caste and the Mutiny, if it brought no tangible and immediate results, worked its way slowly into a position of considerable influence.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1 Quoted in Joseph Kingsmill, *British Rule and British Christianity in India.* London, 1859, p.321.
2 *Friend of India*, 28 May, 1857, quoted from a book of cuttings by T.S. Burrell, in U.T.C. Archives, Bangalore.
3 For the East India Company's reaction to Daniel Wilson's attempt to curb caste in the Tanjore Church see Bateman, J. *The Life of the Rt. Rev. Daniel Wilson, D.D.* 2 vols. London. 1860, p.457.
4 *A Memorial to the Queen from the Church Missionary Society on the Religious Policy of the Government of India.* London 1858, p.l.
5 In Kingsmill, op. cit., pp.321-2. Cf. "'Let Government meet openly as a Christian government'', wrote a Hindu official at the height of the tumult. "Let it pay missionaries and distribute Bibles. But let it not use its strength or force to interfere with caste'''. Arthur Mayhew, *Christianity and the Government of India.* London, 1929, p.185.
6 *Calcutta Review*, December, 1857, quoted from Burrell's Cuttings, U.T.C. Archives.
7 *The Indian Crisis: Special General Meeting of the Church Missionary Society at Exeter Hall.* London, 1858, p.l.
8 Henry Venn, *A Plea for an Open and Unfettered Bible in the Government Schools of India.* London, 1859. Venn's point was echoed by R.C. Narrainsalumy, one of John Anderson's Hindu pupils in Madras: 'There is no alternative. England must govern India as a Christian people or relinquish the task ... A government of compromises will only reproduce the horrors of the year 1857'. *The Native Herald,* (Madras) XVII/3 (March 1858) p.24.
9 The Occasional Papers of this Indian Christian Association may be consulted in the C.M.S. Library, London.
10 *A Memorial to the Queen* ... p.7.
11 Burrell's cuttings book.
12 T.S. Burrell, 'Letter from India' of 30 January 1858.
13 Kingsmill, op. cit., 267.
14 Quoted in ibid., pp.253-4.
15 Quoted in ibid., p.30.
16 *C.M.S. Report for 1857-8,* p.95.
17 Ibid., p.97.
18 Ibid., p.107.
19 *Occasional Papers on India – 3: Christian Missions and Government Education in India.* London, 1858, p.20.
20 Henry Carre Tucker, *A Letter to the Rt. Hon. Lord Stanley, MP.* London, 1858.
21 *Occasional Papers on India – 5: Despatches by Sir John Lawrence, G.C.B., Chief Commissioner of the Punjab, on Christianity in India.*
22 Ibid., p.7.
23 Quoted in *C.M.S. Report for 1857-8,* p.122.

24 Rev. W. Archer in *Report of a Deputation of Gentlemen connected with various Missionary Societies to Lord Stanley ... 7 August 1858.* London, 1858.
25 London, 1858.
26 Ibid., p.19.
27 Ibid., p.19.
28 Ibid., p.29.
29 *A Memorial to the Queen* ... p.15.
30 Ibid., p.1. So also Thomas Smith 'The Future of India', in William Hanna, (ed.), *Essays by Ministers of the Free Church of Scotland.* Edinburgh, 1858, and John Wilson, *The Indian Military Revolt viewed in its Religious Aspect.* Bombay, 1857.
31 London, 1858.
32 Calcutta, 1858.
33 Duff, *What is Caste?* pp.14-15.
34 Ibid., p.16.
35 Duff, *Indian Rebellion,* pp.351-2. Duff's argument here is thoroughly tendentious. He must have realised that government refusal to recognize caste would involve enforced breaches of the rules of ritual purity.
36 Ibid., pp.354-5.
37 *What is Caste?,* p.21.
38 *Indian Rebellion,* p.358.
39 E.J. Hardey, 'Hindu Caste', in *Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference, Ootacamund, April 19 - May 5, 1858.* Madras, 1858, pp. 283-290.
40 Henry Meredith Parker, *Caste and Conversion: Being No. 3 of Short Sermons On Indian Texts concerning the Empire of the Middle Classes.* London 1858.
41 *Indian Missions and Government Education* ... p.5.
42 Ibid., p.5.
43 Kingsmill, op. cit., pp. 207-8.
44 Robert E. Frykenberg, 'The Impact of Conversion and Social Reform upon Society in South India during the late Company Period.' in C.H. Philips and M.D. Wainwright (ed.), *Indian Society and the Beginnings of Modernization.* London, 1976, pp. 214-222.
45 *Memorial to the Rt. Hon. Lord Stanley ... from the Members of the Madras Native Association ... on the Subject of Government Interference in Religious Matters.* Madras, 1859.
46 'A Hindu of Bengal', *Causes of the Indian Revolt.* Edited by Malcolm Lewin. London, n.d.,p.20.
47 Max Müller, 'Caste', in *Chips from a German Workshop.* London, 2nd edition 1868, Vol. II, pp.301-359. On Müller's life and thought see Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion.* London, 1976; Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller, PC.* London, 1974, is an idiosyncratic work which is not

always reliable. It tells us almost as much about its author as about Müller.

48 Müller, 'Caste', p.304.
49 Ibid., pp. 304-5.
50 Ibid., p.304.
51 Ibid., pp.311-2.
52 Ibid., p.312.
53 John Wilson, *The Indian Military Revolt viewed in its Religious Aspect.* Bombay, 1857, p.14.
54 Müller, op. cit., p.313.
55 Ibid., p.350.
56 Ibid., p.359.
57 Ibid., p.356.
58 Ibid., p.359.
59 Queen Victoria's Proclamation, 1 November 1858, in C.H. Philips (ed.), *The Evolution of India and Pakistan, 1858-1947: Select Documents.* London 1962, p.11.
60 Ibid., p.11.
61 *C.M.S. Report for 1857-8,* p.121.
62 Letter of 5 February 1859 in L.M.S. Archives, cited in Robert L. Hardgrave, Junior, *The Nadars of Tamilnad.* Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1969, p.64.
63 See, for example, Hardgrave, op. cit., pp.64-70.

CHAPTER IV

CASTE AND THE MASS MOVEMENTS

In the 1860s and the 1870s Christian missions, initially particularly Protestant missions, became aware of an unexpected and dramatic development. In widely separated parts of India, churches which had for the most part been almost static for decades, or even declined in numbers, began to grow at a rapid rate through group conversions from untouchable castes. These large-scale conversions were on the whole a new experience, not because the converts came from depressed sectors of society, and not simply because the numbers involved were unprecedently large, but because the converts came in caste groups rather than as individuals, and the decision to adopt the new faith was usually taken by the caste elders. Group conversion was something most Protestant missions had neither sought nor expected, and to begin with they were puzzled by seeing that caste links could help rather than hinder evangelization: in what the missionaries labelled 'mass movements' the traditional social structure of caste, including links between those who had converted and those who had not, was maintained and showed itself in many ways a useful thing. It took time for the missions to adjust their thinking and their strategy to the new phenomenon, which quickly transformed the whole mission scene, forced missionaries to reassess their attitude to caste, and altered radically the prospects of Christianity in India.

There had indeed been some similar experience of mass movements, but only in isolated and not numerically significant instances. The Paravars, a fisherman caste on the southern tip of the peninsula, had been converted *en bloc* to Roman Catholicism in the sixteenth century. Protestant mass movements among the Karta Bhajas at Krishnagar in Bengal, and among the Nadars or Shanars, a caste of rather indeterminate social status in the south of the Tamil country, had got under way in the early nineteenth century. But these were isolated instances and small in scale; few missionaries accordingly saw group conversion as the way forward, and the most popular strategy was one of downward percolation: first, convert significant individuals from the higher castes and then look to them as agents of a gradual penetration of Christianity to the lower sectors of society. There had indeed been converts from the ranks of the Untouchables and other low sections of society, but for the most part these were individuals who had become detached for one reason or

another from any real group allegiance. The Abbé Dubois announced that of his two or three hundred converts of both sexes, 'two-thirds were pariahs, or beggars: and the rest were composed of *Sudras,* vagrants and outcasts of several tribes, who, being without resource, turned Christians, in order to form new connections, chiefly for the purpose of marriage, or with some other interested views.'[1] Alexander Duff, somewhat later, criticized the vernacular mission schools in Bengal because their pupils were 'children of individuals of a very inferior grade in society – individuals who had been in no perceptible degree affected by those changes which were insensibly stealing into the higher circles – individuals over whom caste and its prejudices still held absolute and undisputed dominion – individuals imbued from infancy with the notion that it was an indignity to ancestors, an impiety against the gods to change the profession of the caste in which they were born, or aspire to anything beyond the humble heritage of their birth.'[2] Neither Duff nor Dubois saw among the Depressed Classes any widely-felt dissatisfaction with their lot, any eagerness for change, or any likelihood that they would in large numbers,with whatever motives, embrace the Christian Faith. Duff did not, of course, share Dubois's profound pessimism about the future of Christianity in India, but he certainly did not see a prospect of the lower classes moving into the church except at the conclusion of a long period of *preparatio evangelica* among the intellectuals. Christianity would percolate downwards slowly until even the Untouchables would at last be gathered in.

Neither Duff nor Dubois foresaw the movement of the Depressed Classes towards Christianity which began in the second half of the nineteenth century, and neither would have been likely to welcome it. That multitudes of the lowest of the low should become at least as discontented with their lot and eager for change, including religious change, as the small intellectual elite of Calcutta had been in the early part of the century, would have amazed Duff; while Dubois hardly looked for the trickle of marginal individuals into the church to become a great flood in which large caste and village groups were converted *en bloc.* It is, however, clearly the case that the converts of the early part of the nineteenth century and before showed a way which masses of the depressed were to follow later. Even a handful of high-caste converts proclaiming the equality of man and the iniquity of the caste system made conversion to Christianity an option more real, strangely enough, for the lowly than for the high-caste converts' peers. And the stragglers and outcastes whom Dubois despised

showed that the possibility of conversion was open to all.

But yet we do not have in this an adequate explanation of how the new restlessness of the lowest came about; although it does, to be sure, lend credibility to a modified form of the percolation theory. Before 1860 mission effort had been directed almost totally towards the conversion of individuals regardless of caste, or concentrated on those from the highest castes, and it was generally assumed, by Protestants at any rate, that converts must separate themselves from the Hindu social context, 'break caste', and enter a new – and exclusive – community. When after 1860, one mission field after another was engulfed by large groups from the depressed castes clamouring for baptism this must be interpreted in part as a response, if a largely unexpected one, to the earlier stance and practice of the missions. Through a series of bitter disputes and conflicts in the first half of the nineteenth century, Protestant missionaries had forged a consensus on the caste issue from which few, apart from the Leipzig Lutherans, differed. This consensus was summed up in a Minute of the Madras Missionary Conference of 1850, to which the Calcutta and Bombay Missionary Conferences also adhered.[3] Caste was declared to be 'one of the greatest obstacles to the progress of the Gospel in India', radically opposed to Christian principles and not to be tolerated in the churches. All native Christians were to be required to renounce caste or suffer severe disciplinary measures. Many missionaries were well aware that the conflicts within the churches on the caste issue in the 1830s and 1840s had not only discouraged numerical growth but had led to notorious schisms, and the reversion to Hinduism of large numbers from many of the South Indian churches; but they regarded the egalitarian principle as too fundamental an issue to be sacrificed for the sake of short-term numerical advantages. Ironically in the light of later developments, they saw the maintenance of social links between converts and their Hindu caste-fellows as simply a standing invitation to apostasy rather than an evangelistic opportunity: 'The retention of Caste tends to keep up an intercourse with the heathen which is contrary to the plain Apostolic command, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord; and touch not the unclean thing" ... A worldly spirit is thus gratified; dissimulation is practically promoted, and the road to apostasy is kept open.'[4]

The missionary conviction of the evils of caste made them positively opposed to the idea of group conversion, and served to reinforce the individualism characteristic of nineteenth century evangelicals. But although it made them very uncertain in their

handling of mass movements in the early years, and continuingly suspicious of group rather than individual action, it formed an essential aspect of the image of the missions as committed to equality and prepared to espouse the cause of the oppressed. The hard line on caste had developed out of the conviction that Christians of low-caste origin were entitled to equality of treatment within the church, and missionaries had already shown themselves in the first half of the nineteenth century willing to act as advocates of the lowest in society through a series of controversies about equal access to public facilities and so forth, the best known of which is perhaps the 'breast cloth dispute' in southern Travancore.[5] A corollary of the missionaries' detestation of caste was their acceptance of the role of protagonists and patrons of the poor, virtually the only people of influence willing to risk schism in the churches or public disturbance for the sake of the depressed.

Missionaries and their allies weighed into the debate on the causes of the Revolt of 1857 and the policies which government should follow as a consequence, as we saw in chapter three. Their arguments were vigorously pressed and well publicized, both in Britain and in India, but without success: the policy of neutrality and non-interference was reaffirmed and in practice rather strengthened. The Queen's Proclamation was interpreted very commonly as supporting the maintenance of caste distinctions and disowning campaigns against caste such as the missionaries were inclined to sponsor. But the debate on the Revolt had two consequences which are important for our present purposes: it gave very wide publicity within India to the fact that the Protestant missionaries were implacably opposed to the inequities produced by caste; and it made it clear to the depressed castes that if they were looking for patrons to espouse their cause they could expect strictly limited help from government, but almost unqualified support from missionaries.

In the earlier part of our period mass movements gravitated far more commonly towards Protestant than towards Roman Catholic missions. There is an element of the paradoxical in this. On the whole the Roman Catholics have all along been fairly consistently favourable towards group conversion and have seldom put as much emphasis on the values of individualism and equality as have the Protestants. This has meant, of course, that they have tended to be very much more tolerant of the caste system and have commonly regarded it as distinguishable from Hindu religion. They did not see conversion as necessarily affecting the social status of the converts.

De Nobili's mission in Madurai, for instance, accepted the desirability of separate churches for high-caste converts. The Romans were eager to maintain and christianize *existing* structures of society, and often put less stress than did the Protestants on programmes of social uplift for their converts. The consequence is that whereas Roman missionary strategy was directed largely towards group conversions, the Protestants who looked for individual decisions attracted far more mass movements, for the tolerant Roman attitude to the caste system made conversion to Catholicism a less plausible escape from that system than conversion to Protestantism.

It was not only the nature, but the scale of mass movements which took missions by surprise, and raises rather tricky problems for the historian. Hardly a region of India did not have a mass movement of a depressed caste into Christianity in our period, and there were similar contemporary movements into other faiths such as Islam, Sikhism, and the Arya Samaj brand of reformed Hinduism. All this seems to suggest a mood of unprecedented restlessness among the depressed. One does not require to overlook the existence in earlier centuries of a wide variety of egalitarian movements of a religious or secular sort to make this claim – no one now can speak with confidence of traditional India as having been a stagnant society, sleeping for centuries undisturbed until rudely awakened by the intruding West. We know of many *bhakti* sects which expressed an egalitarian ethic, while both Buddhism and Islam must have owed something of their attactiveness to converts to their affirmation of the brotherhood of man. Louis Dumont may well be right in saying that 'A sect cannot survive on Indian soil if it denies caste, and it has long been recognized that Buddha himself, if he transcended caste, did not attack or reform it.'[6] But the rise of such sects none the less betokens a protest against caste, a questioning of its legitimacy as a divinely sanctioned ordering of society. But why was there so vast a restlessness, so widely diffused throughout India during the second half of the nineteenth century? This is a trickier question to answer than the question why this restlessness so largely sought a religious form of expression, or why it flowed towards Christianity in particular, and initially towards the Protestant form of Christianity. Eagerness to embrace the religion of the rulers simply because it is the religion of the rulers would surely provide a better explanation of upper caste conversions than of mass movements among the most depressed sections of the community. If we assume that the motive of the converts was escape from oppression and improvement of their lot

and status, we have to inquire why the movement took a specifically religious form, and largely flowed towards Christianity. But the immediate problem is simply this: why was there such an upsurge of discontent among the depressed classes from the middle of the nineteenth century?

It is doubtful if the information is available for us to be able to provide an adequate answer to this question. But some points are certainly relevant. First of all, we may note the cumulative effect of the western impact on India. We shall not think here so much of the intellectual or ideological level. This is indeed important, as has been suggested earlier, but the ideological impact of the West is far easier to trace in the cities and among the educated than among the more depressed sections of the village community with which we are here primarily concerned. The West did much more than introduce new notions; it disturbed traditional village society and the village economy in ways which were felt in even the remotest villages. In as far as the West was a disintegrating force, it served to call in question the accustomed ways, and along with the disintegration of the old order came the opening of new possibilities. Karl Marx was certainly right in seeing the effect of European rule in India as essentially destructive, although perhaps he was over-optimistic, as he was certainly ethnocentric, in seeing the long-term results as regenerative and hopeful. The point is simply this: as the traditional productive relationships and the system of reciprocal duties and services called *jajmani* were undercut, not only did the lowest sections of the village community lose such security as they had had and in most cases find themselves in a worse economic situation than before, but the general loosening of social links within the community set the depressed caste groups free to fend for themselves, to look for new patrons, perhaps, or to change their life-style and religious commitments without the old pressure to conform to the norms of the village community being enforced by the higher castes. Periods of famine provide extreme instances of this process. Missionary sources are frequently aware in a rather simplistic way of a connection between the start of a mass movement and a period of famine. In many cases early converts to Christianity were famine orphans for whom the missionaries had cared, and missionaries believed that their relief measures and charitable activities attracted first the approving attention of the poor, and later their religious allegiance. There may well be something in the belief that many mass movements were initially some kind of response to the behaviour of the missions in times of famine and drought. The famine orphans who became Christians

demonstrated that conversion was possible even for the most depressed, and also that conversion to Christianity would have advantages in terms of immediate economic assistance, and, in the longer term, new educational opportunities and the securing of influential intercessors, as well as providing an escape from degradation. A case in point is the activity of John Clough, an American Baptist missionary, during the famine of 1877-8 in the Telugu country.[7] A mass movement among the Madiga caste had already been under way for some time, and Clough's initial relief measures were intended primarily for the assistance of his converts. Finding that the government was sponsoring large-scale public works as a relief measure, Clough himself took the contract for digging a section of the Buckingham Canal, since he discovered that the Madigas were reluctant to join the work on the canal as they believed they would be oppressed and maltreated on account of their caste. In Clough's camp, however, the Madigas were treated well and gained in esteem because the missionary associated freely with them. The vast numbers of Madigas who were baptized after the famine was over came, Clough believed, seeking not so much material help as human dignity.[8] Clough may exaggerate his case, but he makes a valid point of general importance to our examination of mass movements, which is this: the search for material improvement or enhancement of status is seldom if ever the sole or even the dominant motive in a mass movement. Dignity, self-respect, patrons who will treat one as an equal, and the ability to choose one's own destiny – all these are powerful incentives to conversion.

The various aspirations, spiritual, psychological, social and material, which expressed themselves in a mass movement were best able to surface and become effective in times of social and economic dislocation, and such conditions, of which famines represented an extreme case, were generally present throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. But it is virtually impossible to provide adequate data about the economic and social conditions of the depressed classes in the nineteenth century to substantiate such a hypothesis. It is, of course, true that the situation varied somewhat from region to region, but to provide a really convincing explanation of the widely diffused restlessness of the depressed which fed the mass movements we would need to know not only how they came to have solid aspirations for improvement, but also why these aspirations became so much more effectively articulated, why they so commonly took the form of religious conversion, and why they could not be contained, suppressed, or fulfilled within caste society. It

would be tempting to conjecture that the economic situation of the untoucables deteriorated in our period. It is probable that their relative position in relation to castes which had access to the educational and occupational opportunities presented by the British Raj deteriorated sharply.[9] Certainly some customary sources of income for certain untouchable castes lost much of their importance. The Malas of Krishna-Godavery districts of the Telugu country, for instance, found that weaving, one of their traditional occupations, became considerably less remunerative because of competition from Lancashire. This apparently increased rather than weakened their dependence upon high-caste patrons and confined them more securely in the lower echelons of the village community.[10] But for castes such as the Malas the awareness that their economic condition had deteriorated may well have made them specially eager to embrance the opportunities presented by the social dislocation of a famine. Dr. Oddie's conclusion that the mass movements which he had studied in the Telugu country began among the more economically independent, and only later spread to the weaker sections of the same caste is, probably, generally applicable.[11] But this does not conflict with the suggestions we have made about the significance of social dislocation, and famines in particular. Leadership and initiative could only come from the more independent families or groups that were slightly more prosperous and already had heightened aspirations, but the masses of an untouchable or depressed caste were not in a position to follow such a lead until there had been some loosening of ties within the village community.

Why did the restlessness among the depressed so frequently assume a primarily religious form, and specifically that of conversion? It seems likely that traditional possibilities of mobility within the caste system were increasingly effectively closed to the Untouchables. For one thing, they were unusually fragmented, and collective action predicated upon horizontal group solidarity which could achieve much for castes somewhat higher on the social scale was seldom feasible for them. Sanskritization was a cul-de-sac because of concerted and efficacious rebuffs from the higher castes. It is important to remember that sanskritization is a complex process involving changes in 'customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently "twice-born" caste',[12] whereas 'christianization', although it involves similar changes, is a movement in a different direction. Sanskritization, as Srinivas points out, 'results only in positional changes in the system and does not

lead to any *structural change.*'[13] But a group which adopts Christianity in a mass movement may well have become aware that sanskritization is not a real option for it, or cannot fulfil the group's aspirations, and accordingly seeks to opt out of the system. Similarly the possibilities of advancement through political action or improved education were not very real for the Untouchables. *Bhakti* sects, as we shall see later, were still attractive to the depressed, but tended to feed into conversion movements to one or other of the major non-Hindu faiths, presumably because what the sects had to offer was more narrowly 'religious' and really represented a new symbolic language for the aspirations of the depressed rather than any fulfilment of these aspirations. But we must be cautious here, lest we suggest that the religious dimension was unimportant, or that depressed castes only changed their religious allegiance because more secular avenues of change were closed to them. Nor would it be accurate to claim that the religious change was *simply* a new way of seeking enhanced status and economic improvement. While the hope for these things seems always to be present, it would be a distortion to see it as the dominant or only motive. Clough believed that his mass movement converts were seeking baptism rather than help. When he attempted to dissuade large numbers of Madigas from baptism, wishing to test their motivation as he suspected they were primarily moved by material considerations, 'There was a murmur of dissent. I told them I had no more famine help to give them. Then the cry arose from every portion of the crowd: "We do not want help. By the blisters on our hands we can prove to you that we have worked and will continue to work. If the next crop fails, we shall die. We want to die as Christians. Baptize us, therefore!"'[14] Furthermore, the fact that conversion did not lead in the short term to any significant material improvement, or in the longer term to any significant change in the attitudes of the high-caste people towards the converts or in their treatment of them did not appear to act as a brake on a conversion movement.[15] What must never be neglected is that a conversion movement is like a kind of group identity crisis, in which the group passes through a negative rejection of their lowly place in Hindu society to a positive affirmation of a new social and religious identity. This new identity does not depend on its acceptance and recognition by the higher castes; indeed it has been chosen and is sustained despite their refusal to accept it. Only gradually does it lead to significant alterations in behaviour and occupation, and sometimes to a recognized enhancement of status.[16]

There were also advantages flowing from having missionaries as patrons, who could intercede with government and protect converts against money-lenders, the lower echelons of government, and the exploitation of higher castes. Converts also derived a certain prestige by association with missionaries: 'The caste people decided that "though the Ongole Dhora (Clough) had made a big Madiga of himself", he had not thereby lost caste with the men of the ruling race, since they came and ate with him. The social status of the Madigas was rising. The contact between West and East here shed light upon the Christian sense of the brotherhood of man.'[17] New educational opportunities gradually came available to converts, and changes in life-style became accepted. Converts were expected to give up the eating of carrion and drinking alcohol, were encouraged to show greater cleanliness, and soon found it possible to enter a variety of occupations which had hitherto been closed to them, such as school teaching, or work in one of the 'mission industries.'[18]

If large-scale group conversions for the depressed castes took place typically in situations where the village community had been weakened, the conversions themselves introduced new and severe tensions into the village. As converts sometimes refused to continue in occupations they considered degrading, so they dissociated themselves, sometimes gradually, sometimes abruptly, from performing their traditional roles in village festivals.[19] Such behavioural changes were often met with straight repression from the higher castes, who quite correctly understood that their traditional position was being threatened, and the solidarity of the village as a sacral community destroyed. Attempts were made repeatedly by the high castes to enforce the strictest rules about dress, occupation, manners and social behaviour generally on converts and the Untouchables as a whole, and these attempts frequently led to violence.[20] But if the initial mass movement converts showed a reluctance to cut their ties with their caste fellows and in some ways retained a considerable degree of independence of missionaries in as far as the group, retaining its own leaders and internal structure, when converted did not normally seek to leave the village and enter a 'mission compound' ghetto unless faced by severe persecution. There were, it is true, Christian villages established in various parts of India for mass movement converts, and the importance of the Punjab canal colonies for the mass movement among the Chuhras will be examined later. But, on the whole, mass movement converts continued to live in their former villages, with all the tensions and opportunities which this involved. Because of the scale of

conversions, village congregations had to be allowed considerable autonomy – there were just not enough missionaries, pastors, and trained catechists to go round. Thus some forms of missionary paternalism were challenged, but the missionaries struggled hard to retain control because they feared the mass movements might easily be transformed into barely Christian forms of millenarianism, or gradually peter out, if conversion were not seen to bear visible fruits in terms of secular advancement.

Missionaries hoped that these 'visible fruits' among converts who remained in continuing contact with the village community would attract not only others of the same caste, but would also bring in converts, or even spark off mass movements, among other castes. There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that group conversion movements seldom started spontaneously among the lowest and most depressed castes but among castes one stage higher in the hierarchy (even if still regarded as untouchable), and that within the castes affected by mass movements the first individuals and families to convert were among the more prosperous and independent. Such individuals and castes had rather more room to manoeuvre than the most depressed, and usually showed both heightened aspirations and an openness towards change before conversion. Conversion accordingly sometimes represented the adopting of a religious understanding commensurate with their aspirations, instead of one which sanctioned the oppressive *status quo*.

Caste boundaries have proved to be considerable obstacles to the spread of conversion. This is particularly true of percolation downwards, but a horizontal flow between two castes of roughly equivalent status also presents major problems, especially if they occupy overlapping territory. In the Telugu country, for instance, mass movements developed among two untouchable castes, the Malas and Madigas, who had perennial disputes about their relative status. Despite the rivalry between the two castes, there was some interaction between them but on the whole in areas where many Malas became Christians the Madigas were found to be unresponsive, and *vice versa*. Where substantial numbers of both castes were converted in the same area, they either gravitated towards different denominations, or their traditional animosity led to constant trouble in the congregation.[21] The case is rather different where we are dealing with two castes similar in status, occupation, and so on, but occupying different territories, such as the Nadars, the toddy-tappers of south Madras and Travancore, and the Ezhavas of north Travancore and Malabar. The mass movement among the

Nadars had considerable influence on the Ezhavas and upon missionary hopes for a mass movement among Ezhavas. Why this never effectively got under way we shall have occasion to discuss later.

In several places the mass movements among Malas and Madigas in the Telugu country sparked off individual conversions or even small-scale group conversions among other castes rather higher in the scale, some of them ranking as Sudra castes. Church leaders had very great hopes that a strong pattern of group conversion would spread upwards from the Untouchables to the higher castes, but these expectations were not on the whole realized.[22] James Manor has pointed out that several castes which were called 'Sudra' in enthusiastic mission reports were in fact of highly indeterminate position within the hierarchy, or were really semi-nomadic groups which did not have any fixed placing in a local hierarchical ranking, and also that a sizeable proportion of these 'Sudra' converts reverted after a few years to Hinduism. His material from Guntur District suggests that little that could really be called a *mass* movement occurred among 'Sudra' castes, and that there were few castes where new converts really had to integrate themselves with congregations which were largely composed of converts from the lowest castes. But suggesting that in almost every case of group conversion of Sudras there was some material advantage directly in view Manor questions by implication the claim of missionaries and church leaders that higher castes were impressed by the transformation in the life of those they had despised, and were seeking the secret of their new self respect and joy. Probably in most cases there was something of both types of motivation at work. The significant thing shown by the Andhra data is that simultaneous mass movements among two untouchable castes interacted with each other in a variety of ways, and that large-scale movements into the church from these two low castes did not impede and may well have encouraged quite significant accessions to the same church from other castes, some of them certainly higher in traditional status.[23] The Nadar mass movement, for example, was sparked off by the conversion of groups of the Sambavar caste, reckoned to be considerably lower in status than the Nadars.[24] Similar instances are reported from Medak in Hyderabad,[25] and from Dornakal. But on the whole the expectation that low-caste mass movements would instigate parallel movements among higher castes on a large scale was disappointed.

Christianity was, of course, only one among a number of religious avenues explored by the depressed castes. Although there was a

variety of local egalitarian sects which attracted Untouchables and some of which, as we shall see, fed into Christian mass movements, it was the Christian missions which were in most places first to respond religiously to the nineteenth-century restlessness among Untouchables, a discontent which itself may have been partly sparked off by indirect Christian influence. But it quickly became clear in most areas that christianization was only one of several alternative possibilities for a caste seeking to escape from a status and conditions deemed to be intolerable within the Hindu social structure. Numerous cases are on record of low-caste groups being converted to Islam in the nineteenth century, and doubtless there had been far more in earlier centuries.[26] The mass movement among the Chuhras of the Punjab was contemporary with a gradual movement towards Islam.[27] Also in the Punjab, Sikhs were active in proselytizing among Untouchables, and large groups of sweepers and other low castes were converted to Sikhism.[28]

Other avenues were presented by movements which in their inception were largely responses or counters to the scale of conversions to Christianity. In the first place there was the Arya Samaj. The Samaj, founded by Dayananda Saraswati in 1875, was on the one hand a Hindu reform movement and on the other a purpose-built counter to conversions to any non-Hindu faith. The readmission of converts through a rite of purification called *shuddhi* was itself a significant innovation from the point of view of Hindu orthodoxy, but the Samaj's attitude towards the caste system and untouchability remained for long rather ambiguous, and this considerably hindered its early attempts to stem and reverse the flow of Untouchables out of the Hindu fold. Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Samaj, declared that caste 'is not a religious institution, for the salvation of men and their fate in the other world does not depend on its observance. The castes are simply different professions or guilds (Adhikaras) established by the state to guard against confusion and mutual interference for the better accomplishment of the different works.'[29] Yet the Samaj was very hesitant to advocate a thoroughgoing reform of the caste system and its members continued to observe their own caste customs. The Arya Samaj wished to remain within Hinduism and win back the converts, rather than break away by rejecting caste practices. But *shuddhi* was not often acceptable to the convert if it involved a return to social degradation on his part. Internal factions and schisms within the Samaj, particularly the formation of the Arya Bhrati Sabha in 1895 and the Jat Pat Todak Mandal in 1922, forced the Samaj into a more

critical attitude towards caste, and the number of *shuddhis* then increased dramatically. The Samaj became effective only when it denied that untouchability was a necessary part of Hinduism, and began to encourage social relationships — intermarriage, interdining and so forth — among Samajists of different castes.[30]

The Depressed Classes Mission, founded in 1906, was not as explicitly committed as the Arya Samaj to countering conversions, and devoted itself to educational and social work among the Untouchables. In this it was to some extent emulating the modes of work of the Christian missions, but although it included in its objectives 'Preaching... principles of Liberal Religion' there seems to have been a feeling among its leaders that conversion was a false solution to the Untouchables' problems. It is true that philanthropic work of this sort undertaken by people of various religions (although the initial impetus and most of the leadership came from the Prarthana Samaj) was a response to the work of the Christian missions which also served gradually to reduce the unique attractiveness of Christianity to the Untouchables.[31]

The question of conversion to non-Hindu faiths of the Untouchables became a politically explosive issue in the 1930s, when Gandhi's strong opposition serves to remind us that the extent of conversion, mainly to Christianity, among the Untouchables already presented the prospect of an imminent mass defection from Hinduism of most of what were now called the Harijans, or Scheduled Castes. And Gandhi did more than attack conversion as an irrelevant and unpatriotic response to their problems on the part of the depressed; he and Congress held out possibilities within the national movement of advancement without leaving the Hindu fold which probably did much to stem the flow of conversions. But the fact that the 1950s saw such massive accessions of neo-Buddhism demonstrates that the question of religious identity has still not become irrelevant.

Most, but not all, of the options facing the Untouchables were specifically religious, and census returns, particularly from the United Provinces, go to confirm the impression of many knowledgeable observers that the depressed were in the nineteenth century exploring a variety of avenues in a somewhat volatile way. In some districts larger numbers of Untouchables by far return themselves in a particular census as Christians than all the missions together claimed as their adherents; a census or two later, the official figures fall dramatically, and apparently the same people are returning themselves as Aryas, or Muslims, or Hindus once more.

There is a fruitful area for research here, which needs to be carefully explored.

We will now examine some typical cases.

The earliest recorded Christian mass movement was that among the Paravar caste of pearl fishermen around the southern tip of the peninsula. Much harassed and oppressed by 'Arab' pirates and by powerful Hindus, the Paravars sent deputations seeking Portuguese protection and offering to adopt Christianity as a kind of *quid pro quo*. By 1537 almost the whole caste has been baptized and the Portuguese had accepted some kind of responsibility for their protection. They remained virtually without any Christian instruction or nurture, and when Francis Xavier came some years later, not only did he take in hand the instruction of the convert community, but he baptized considerable numbers of another fisher caste, the Mukkavars.

The movement had spread, this time to a caste in a very similar social and political situation but living on the other side of Cape Comorin. Both castes retained most of their social structure and little attempt was made to integrate them with Christians from other backgrounds. With christianization came association with the Portuguese, and this afforded them protection but not significant or immediate enhancement of status. The educational, economic, and social changes flowing from conversion were not great and there was no concerted attempt at community uplift for many years. Bishop Caldwell, whose conviction that conversion and improvement should go hand in hand was reinforced by his own experience among the Nadars, compared the Paravars very unfavourably with the Protestant converts: 'The genius of Romanism is unfavourable to improvement... Consequently it may not only be asserted but proved, to the satisfaction of every candid enquirer, that in intellect, habits and morals the Romanist Hindus do not differ from the heathens in the smallest degree.'[32] Certainly Caldwell's judgement is too sweeping, but there is enough truth in it to explain why, with the decline of Portuguese power, there were few mass movements into the Roman Catholic church until the late nineteenth century.[33]

The case of the Nadars or Shanars of Tamilnad is one of the best documented and most interesting of all mass movements. In the mid-nineteenth century the missionaries found the Nadars in 'a social limbo somewhere between the Sudras and the outcaste untouchables',[34] highly dissatisfied with their position, and intent on improvement. While this picture was true of the caste as a whole, it was particularly the case among the middle Nadars, who were neither

virtually enslaved nor in positions of hereditary leadership within the caste. The Nadars' attention seems first to have been drawn to the possibilities of uplift presented by the church when they saw groups of Sambavars becoming Christians. The Sambavars were decidedly lower in status than the Nadars, but the Sambavar movement, which was always on a small scale, sparked off a massive movement of Nadars into the church in south Travancore and Tinnevelly District. Indeed the L.M.S. in Travancore and some of the C.M.S. and S.P.G. stations in Tinnevelly became known as 'Nadar churches' and converts from other castes were not encouraged. Sixty-eight per cent of all the Anglican Christians in Tinnevelly Diocese in the 1930s were Nadars, but there were only about twenty per cent of Nadars in the South India United Church in the same area, and a mere handful in the Lutheran Church.[35] In Travancore the vast majority of Christian Nadars were 'L.M.S. Christians'. Thus relations between denominations could have a caste dimension. It was also the case that congregations in a particular area might be composed virtually entirely of converts from one caste, forming a kind of caste-sect within the larger church organization.

By no means all Nadars became Christian, however, although the whole caste seems to have shared a strong impulse towards improvement of status. Sections of Nadars who did not convert followed the alternative path of sanskritization, but the caste as a whole with its Christian and Hindu branches retained a considerable degree of coherence, and as the Nadars battled for recognition of their claims to enhanced status, and improved their educational and economic position they learned the value of caste solidarity. Christian Nadars retained a pride in their caste and many links with their Hindu caste-fellows. Indeed Robert Hardgrave argues that it was the missions which primarily were responsible for awakening Nadar caste consciousness over a wide area.[36] Furthermore, within the Nadar community we see the two avenues of sanskritization and christianization in direct competition. Hardgrave's conclusion that sanskritization failed[37] may be a little hasty, but he seems to be correct in suggesting that the Christian Nadars have been the pacemakers for the whole community as far as social chance is concerned. Yet this did not bring more than a significant section of the Nadar caste into the church, nor is there evidence to suggest that the 'Nadar churches' were particularly eager for the evangelisation of other castes within the Nadar country. In north Madras, the Telugu country, and elsewhere the situation was different, and numerous Tinnevelly Christians of Nadar extraction played notable missionary

roles, the best known of their number being Bishop V.S. Azariah of Dornakal.

By way of contrast, consider the Ezhavas of Kerala. Here the missionaries' hopes of a substantial mass movement similar to that among the Tamil Nadars were unfulfilled. The Ezhavas were the Kerala equivalent to the Nadars in the Tamil country: they shared the traditional occupation of toddy-tapping, their low status was roughly the same in the two regional hierarchies, the older and somewhat derogatory title of Shanar was sometimes applied to both castes, and both had shown enthusiasm and determination for the improvement of their status and prospects. Bishop Caldwell believed that the two castes had a common origin.[38] Yet the response of the two castes to Christian evangelism was markedly different. The L.M.S. area included major centres of the Nadar mass movement as well as districts with substantial Ezhava population. The missionaries were always looking for the Ezhavas to respond as the Nadars were doing. But they never did, at least never on anything like the same scale. The C.M.S. in Travancore had innumerable contacts with the Society's stations in Tinnevelly, and hoped in vain to see similar developments among the Ezhavas in the part of Travancore where they were established. In both situations the missionaries did battle for the rights of the underprivileged groups and offered educational and other possibilities of improvement. But there were substantial differences as well. The movements among the Nadars in south Travancore began nearly half a century before the missionaries in north Travancore really became committed to work among the lower castes. The Nadars in the south were able virtually to take over the church and use it in part as an expression of their caste identity; in the north the Ezhavas found that all places of influence within the church were already occupied by Syrians and that there were influential blocs of converts from other castes as well, impeding any kind of Ezhava monopoly. The kind of social and moral changes which the missionaries expected of the Nadar converts were in general congruent with the caste's aspirations, but in the case of the Ezhavas the missionaries insisted on changes in the marriage system which were not acceptable, and tended to arouse feelings of caste solidarity against outside intervention. Ezhavas had a way of tantalizing missionaries by seeming on the brink of conversion as long as they could gain education or political support, but seldom actually being baptized, and they were not beyond using the prospect of a mass conversion to Christianity as an argument for gaining some concession or recognition from the *sirkar* or from other Hindu

groups. A church which was dominated by Syrians, included converts from castes which the Ezhavas themselves regarded as polluting, and insisted on reforms of manners which the Ezhavas found pointless or offensive was not generally attractive to the Ezhava caste. Their path of group improvement and upward mobility led them not into the church but into the formation of the Narayana Guru movement for the social and religious uplift of the caste within the Hindu fold, and the choice of the Nayars rather than the Syrians, the Nadars or the missionaries as the model to be emulated.[39]

Groups of Ezhavas and Thiyas (the name for the caste in Malabar) did in fact become converted to Christianity, Sikhism, or Islam, but the numbers were never large – just enough to give reality to the threat of mass defection. In August, 1936, for example, Dr K.P. Thayil and about thirty-three others embraced Islam. Dr Thayil 'was convinced that the Thiyas could no longer remain within the fold of Hinduism consistent with their self-respect and he had decided to embrace Islam for the sake of securing the social, political and religious freedom of his community. Their accredited organizations, the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam in Travancore, the Thiya Mahajana Sabha in Cochin and the Thiya Malabar Yogum in British Malabar, had officially announced their decision to give up Hinduism and he rejoiced that he had met with success in so far as he was instrumental to a certain extent in bringing about the above result.'[40] In November of the same year, the Government of Tranvancore responded to this kind of pressure in a symbolic gesture of vast significance; the temples were opened to all classes of Hindus. The Maharaja's Proclamation modelled on Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858, read: 'Profoundly convinced of the truth and validity of our religion, believing that it is based on divine guidance and all-comprehending toleration, knowing that in its practice it has throughout the centuries adapted itself to the needs of changing times, solicitous that none of our Hindu subjects should by reason of birth, caste or community be denied the consolation and solace of the Hindu Faith, we have decided and hereby declare, ordain and command that... there should be henceforth no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth or religion on entering and worshipping at temples controlled by us and our government.'[41] The effect was almost instantaneous. Threats of mass conversion were no longer heard, for the Ezhavas, and other low castes, saw that they had a future within the Hindu community and that pressure from them

could be effective in eliciting a response. A road to advancement without conversion was now clearly open.[42]

A further case is the mass movement among the Chuhras, a caste of untouchable sweepers and landless labourers in the Punjab.[43] The Protestant community in the Punjab increased from 3,823 in 1881 to 483,081 in 1947, this spectacular growth being almost entirely the result of the mass movement which swept through certain districts such as Sialkot and Narowal. The Chuhras had impressed the missionaries from the beginning as a community which was in a rebellious mood against the Hindu social order. Bishop Whitehead 'found in the Punjab nothing corresponding to the helpless apathy of despair that is so characteristic of the Pariahs of the Tamil country, and in a less degree of the Malas and Madigas in the Telugu country. On the contrary, the Chuhras are filled with a deep, passionate resentment against their servile conditions ... It seems to portend a widespread revolt against existing social conditions.[44] Other observers noted that the skull measurements undertaken by no less an authority than Risley put the Chuhras alongside the Punjab Brahmans 'as representatives of the purest Indo-Aryan stock!'[45] Untouchable they might be, but 'they are also MEN, big strong strapping fellows, with plenty of intelligence, more prepossessing and self-reliant than the Chamars of the United Provinces or the Pariahs and Pilayas of South India.'[46] The Chuhras themselves had a story that they had originally been Brahmans but had become polluted by undertaking, for motives of charity, the removal of the carcass of a cow. Restoration of status had been delayed by tricks, but was sure to take place during the present era, the 'fourth Jug'.[47] The time of restoration had now come, and along with a determination to better their economic and social lot the Chuhras showed themselves determined on change of religion. Any religion which rejected caste and countenanced their aspirations had attractions for the Chuhras, and although the largest number became Christian, there were also substantial movements into Sikhism, Islam, and the Arya Samaj and there continued to be a degree of leakage between the various alternatives to traditional Hinduism.

The Chuhra's 'passion for liberty' was in part also hunger for land. The new canal colonies had brought to agriculture in the Punjab great prosperity in which Chuhra labourers had a share through enhanced wages. Numbers of Chuhras moved to the colonies and managed to set up as successful tenant farmers, or remained as labourers, but in much more favourable conditions. Missionaries persuaded the Government to allocate land, on which Christian

settlements such as Montgomerywala, Batemanbad, Youngsonbad, Martinpur, and Khushpur — their extraordinary names reflected in most cases the name of a local missionary patriarch – were set up. Almost all the colonists in these settlements were Christian, and their existence gave the missions an ability to do something to meet the land-hunger of converts as well as providing an escape from situations of virtual serfdom. Christian Chuhras quickly became a kind of yeomanry, and during the First World War there was a Christian Chuhra regiment (73rd Punjabi) in the Indian Army.

The Chuhra movement was a kind of communal declaration of independence on such a large scale, particularly between 1880 and 1920, that missionaries were incapable of giving as much oversight and retaining as much control as they wished. This meant that local congregations often had a high degree of autonomy, but that the educational level did not improve as rapidly as had been hoped. As in most north Indian mass movements the position of the traditional *biradari* (brotherhood) was problematical. It was clear, on the one hand, that the *biradari* had played a significant role in the caste's entry to the church, and where only part of the caste had been converted the *biradari* maintained links which might enable the remainder to enter the church. In addition, the *biradari* continued to provide cohesion and social control which was particularly important when such large numbers converted that Christian instruction, discipline, and pastoral care could be provided in the initial stage. On the other hand, the *biradari* was not the church, its norms and sanctions were not always acceptable to the church, and inevitably the *biradari* concerned with the interests of a caste group came from time to time into conflict with a church struggling to transcend caste. 'The Sweeper *biradari*', exclaimed a despairing missionary, 'stands for *Bhangiism*, as the Chamar *biradari* stands for *Chamarism*.'[48] As long as the *biradari* was tolerated or even encouraged, thorough-going christianization was impossible because the *biradari* retained total control over the lives of its members, and would never allow the church to impinge on its powers in such a way as to threaten caste solidarity or encourage individual initiative or independence. The church's ambivalence towards the *biradari* was largely a transitional phase, however, and eventually in most places the church took over most of the functions of the traditional *biradari*.[49]

An instructive instance of a mass movement which collapsed is that of Krishnagar, in Bengal. When the Church Missionary Society

established its first school here in 1832 they found that the district was a stronghold of an anti-Brahman and vaguely egalitarian sect, the Karta Bhajas, which drew most of its adherents from the lowest ranks of society. The adherents of this sect very quickly began to show interest in Christianity, and numbers were baptized. But it was a local famine in 1838 which brought into being a mass movement of very considerable proportions: some 3,000 were candidates for baptism before 1839 was over, and during the next few years the church continued to grow at a prodigious rate. But early observers quickly concluded that the motives of the converts had been unhealthily mixed, one of the converts saying, for example, that 'With the Christians they found *pity*, as also *money and rice*, which they did not obtain from the zamindars.'[50] The converts became excessively dependent in every way on the missionaries, and the mission was notable both for its loyalty to the government and for the factional disputes it nurtured. During the Mutiny the native Christians addressed the government: 'In the troubles of our governors we are troubled ... in case any further troubles should arise, we native Christians in the Kishnagurh Districts, if called on, will be ready to aid the Government to the utmost of our power, both by bullock carts and men, or in any other way in which our services may be required, and that cheerfully, and without wages or remuneration.'[51] But if the missionaries were willing to boast of the loyalty of the Krishnagar Christians, they were already deeply distressed by the state of the mission. By 1857 they noted that large numbers of converts had relapsed and a number of outstations had had to be closed. The mission was riven with old caste distinctions, and when James Vaughan arrived in the district in 1875 he was horrified by the existence of competing groups of 'Hindu Christians', 'Mussulman Christians', and 'Mochie Christians'. The Mochies, being leatherworkers, were regarded as unclean by the caste Christians, were often excluded from the churches, and sometimes their children were left unbaptized as the pastors feared that any contact on their part with the 'Mochies' would offend the congregations. Vaughan attempted to force the issue by calling the various factions together to share a meal and receive communion at the same altar. 'That night', he wrote, 'witnessed the disruption of the Mission. The churches were deserted; the children were removed from the schools; and as we passed from village to village, scowls and revilings were our portion'. A number of the Christians went over to the Roman Catholics and a sizeable remnant remained with the C.M.S. and accepted the stricter discipline which Vaughan imposed.

The 'Mochies' in particular felt gratified that their rights to equality of treatment had been vindicated, as had the rights of the 'pariah Christians' in the southern churches some fifty years before. And this confirmed once more that when it came to the bit, Protestant missionaries could be counted upon to side with the depressed.[52] Missionaries looked to Krishnagar as a dire warning of the dangers of caste when a mass movement is handled incorrectly.

Mass movements raised new problems for the missions and presented new possibilities which together made inevitable a major reassessment of theology, evangelistic strategy, and the attitudes to be adopted towards caste in particular and Hinduism in general. The Protestant missionaries' antagonism to caste was closely related in most cases to an extreme individualism which made them more than a little suspicious of group conversions. A change of heart leading to an individual seeking instruction and then baptism they could understand, but the conversion of whole social groups was something they had neither desired nor welcomed. Clough in the Telugu country was at first extremely reluctant to baptize the multitudes who came to him. Only when it became obvious that if he did not baptize them the Roman Catholics would, and encouragement to go forward came from his home board, did he relent, with not a little embarrassment.[53] To be fair, the obstacle to welcoming the mass movement converts in this case, as in many others, was not simply an individualistic theology; there was also the fear that the converts' motives might well be largely materialistic – no missionary in his senses wanted to buy rice Christians, especially if he knew the story of Krishnagar. The theological issue was fought out at the 1879 Decennial Missionary Conference in Bangalore, where it was concluded that group conversions should be welcomed and a less individualistic Gospel preached, although mass movements were recognized as posing particular problems, especially the danger of caste feeling again disrupting the congregations and mercenary motives masquerading as conversion. The Conference felt able to welcome mass movements and approved the conduct of missionaries such as Clough who were recruiting large numbers of new converts in caste groups; but at the same time it reaffirmed in the most emphatic terms the opposition to caste of previous missionary conferences.[54] Later on this total rejection of caste was to be somewhat modified, as missionaries came to see that although caste was religiously objectionable considered as a dimension of Hinduism and as encouraging arrogance, oppression, and inhumanity, it none the less provided a system of social cohesion

which was still useful and alive among mass movement converts, and its lines of communication could as easily lead to conversions as to apostasy.

Mass movements also lead to a certain tentative reassessment of Hinduism on the part of some missionaries. In a significant number of cases a mass movement had had as its precursor a syncretistic and egalitarian sect. Such was the cult of Yogi Pothuluri Virabrahman among the Madigas. The devotees of Virabrahman had a millennial expectation of a coming time when caste would be destroyed and the equality of all men established. Virtually all of them came over to Christianity, and with conversion became more assertive in their claims to better treatment and their opposition to oppression.[55] Other similar instances have been noted earlier. Sympathetic missionaries could not but see such sects as both Hindu and clearly a preparation for the coming of Christianity. Those who held such views could no longer be as unqualified in their denunciation of Hinduism.

Mass movements renewed in a particularly acute form the problem of caste in the churches. Caste groups which showed an openness to the possibility of conversion were usually those which had already developed some sense of solidarity – this is one reason why mass movements rarely started at the very bottom of the social scale. Conversion and its aftermath frequently solidified this caste feeling, as observers such as Hardgrave, Fishman and Uma Ramaswamy point out.[56] This led, in the first place, to a tendency for denominational divisions to correspond with caste divisions, as we saw in the case of the Nadars. Uma Ramaswamy argues rather unconvincingly that missionaries in the Telugu country 'did nothing to whittle down caste distinctions within the church itself. Rather, they exploited caste cleavages in their efforts at conversion.'[57] Missionaries were in fact acutely uneasy at the introduction of caste feeling which seemed inevitable in a group conversion movement, and their steps to counter it led to a number of schisms, and sometimes halted or reversed the flow of conversions. They were acutely aware of the possibility of 'caste churches' not only forming a standing refutation of the universality of the Gospel, but becoming encapsulated within Hindu society, accepted, recognized, accorded an appropriate status, and their particular cult tolerated, but rendered quite innocuous because they were acting as a caste within the caste system. This sort of thing happened to the Syrian Christians and to numerous *bhakti* sects. But the alternative policy, of discouraging firmly any expression of caste feeling and attempting to ensure that congregations did not become enclaves for converts from

one particular caste also led to serious problems — internal dissent, tension between missionaries and converts, factional animosity, the weakening or destruction of old social bonds while no adequate replacement was possible, and greater suspicion on the part of the Hindu population.

From the early 1930s the issue of conversion from among the depressed classes was increasingly treated as a political issue. Possibilities of advancement for the Harijans using strictly secular paths increased vastly in importance, and the various kinds of protective discrimination formed a strong disincentive to conversion as they were, and are, available only to 'Hindu Harijans' in most instances.[58] But the continuation of group conversions in recent years – neo-Buddhism is the most spectacular, but by no means the only instance – is an interesting and significant phenomenon, demonstrating that even at a time when much has been gained for the Untouchables through political action the question of religious identity remains real and alive – so real that many are willing to sacrifice the protection and advantages which accrue to Hindu Harijans. There is also probably some dissillusion with the fruits of political action and statutory enactments. These by themselves cannot provide the dignity as well as opportunities and material advancement which is sought. Self-respect, as missionaries had long before discovered, is more important than charity, even if the charity comes from government.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

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15 Oddie, op. cit., p. 76; J. W. Pickett, *Christian Mass Movements in India.* Lucknow, 1933, passim, but esp. pp. 58-124.
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44 Whitehead, op. cit., pp. 444-5.

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46 *The Call from the Land of the Five Rivers,* p. 5.
47 Ibid.
48 E. Fieldhouse, in *Report of the Conference of the Depressed Classes Committee, Cawnpore, 9-11 Oct., 1928 of the United Provinces Christian Council,* pp. 47-9.
49 On the *biradari* question see, in addition to the previous reference, Ernest Y. Campbell, op. cit., esp. chap. 3; Pickett, op. cit., pp. 177-180; Robert C. Alter, 'Church and Biradari in a Rural Church Area of Central Uttar Pradesh', *Religion and Society,* X, 4 (Dec. 1963), pp. 45-47.
50 J. Long, *Handbook of Bengal Missions,* 185, quoted in James Vaughan, *The Trident, the Crescent and the Cross.* London, 1876, p.299.
51 *C.M.S. Report for 1857-8,* p.99.
52 On Krishnagar, in addition to the above, see Eugene Stock *The History of the Church Missionary Society.* London, 1899, Vol. I, pp.314-6; Vol. II, pp.165-6; Vol. III, pp.134-8; Vaughan, op. cit., pp.297-301.
53 Clough, op. cit., pp.263-290.
54 Clough, op. cit., pp.305-7; *The Missionary Conference: South India and Ceylon,* two vols. Madras and London,1880.
55 S. Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religion.* Bombay, 1905, pp. 260-264; Clough, op. cit., pp. 93 and 239-240.
56 Hardgrave, op. cit., pp. 69-70; A. T. Fishman, op. cit.; Uma Ramaswamy, 'Self-identity among Scheduled Castes: A Study of Andhra', *Economic and Political Weekly,* IX/47 (23 Nov. 1974), pp.1950-1964.
57 Ramaswamy, op. cit., p.1959.
58 See D. E. Smith, *India as a Secular State.* Princeton, 1963, pp. 304-330; K. C. Alexander, 'The Neo-Christians of Kerala', in J. Michael Mahar (ed.), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India.* Tucson, 1972.

CHAPTER V

CASTE, CONVERTS AND THE KERALA CHRISTIANS

(i) Kerala Society

The Malayalam-speaking country on the south-west coast of India, now the State of Kerala, is known as the area where the caste system survived longest in its most rigorous form, and also as the home of the oldest Christian community in India, the Syrian Christians of Malabar. These factors together have led to the question of the relation of caste to Christianity taking on a rather different form in Kerala. Nowhere else in India is there a large and ancient Christian community which has from time immemorial been accorded a high status in the caste hierarchy; nowhere else, western observers believed, could the evils of caste be seen so clearly, particularly in the nineteenth century. Protestant missionaries believed that here the effects of a compromise with caste were peculiarly obvious, and here they encountered in its acutest form the problems arising from having Christians of widely different caste backgrounds and social status within one church. The picture which emerges from a study of Kerala highlights and clarifies the issues as experienced in other parts of the sub-continent.

The rules of pollution were more precisely formulated and rigidly enforced in Kerala than elsewhere in India. Most of the untouchable castes were in fact predial slaves until the middle of the nineteenth century, and were subject to countless degrading regulations to avoid their polluting high-caste men by physical contact, approach ('distance pollution'), or even by sight. Pulayas and Ezhavas for instance, were not allowed to use the roads when men of higher castes were passing by and when they wished to sell or barter articles they would lay them down, retire to the statutory distance, and conduct negotiations by shouting.[1] Inter-caste relations were regulated with punctilious exactness in every detail. 'A Nair', wrote the wife of a C.M.S. missionary in 1860, 'may approach but not touch a Nambudiri Brahmin; A Chogan (Ezhava) must remain thirty-six steps off, and a Pariar some distance further still. A Syrian Christian may touch a Nair (though this is not allowed in some parts of the country) but the latter may not eat with each other. Poolians and Pariars, who are the lowest of all, may approach but not touch, much less may they eat with each other.'[2] More than two pages of Hutton's

Caste in India[3] are devoted to variations on the details of these rules noted by observers between 1800 and 1937, depicting a pattern of quite unusual rigidity persisting into recent times, although a contemporary anthropologist, writing in the 1960s, notes that 'social distance, both vertical and horizontal, has diminished very much from what it was three or four decades ago.'[4]

Within this system the large Syrian Christian community was accorded a position of considerable esteem, on the second or third rung from the top of the hierarchy, as it were, either equal to, or immediately below the Nairs. The origins of the community are the subject of much learned and inconclusive debate. Most Syrian Christians themselves believe that their Church was founded by the apostle Thomas, who after converting large numbers from various castes on the Malabar Coast was martyred by enraged Brahmans at Mylapore on the Coromandel Coast. There are also traditions that various immigrant groups of Christians settled in what is now Kerala and formed the nucleus of the Syrian Christian community. St. Thomas is said to have converted 32 Nambudiri families and some Syrian Christians of today claim to be able to trace back their ancestry to these early converts.[5] There is a tradition that one Thomas Cana, a Syrian merchant, settled in Malabar in the fourth century along with a considerable number of his fellow-Christians and intermarried with the local people.[6] There is, however, a total absence of any reliable evidence concerning the original establishment of Christianity on the Malabar Coast and its gradual assimilation into caste society. We do not know whether the Syrian church was ever evangelistic nor, if it was, what was the scope and nature of its recruiting activities. J. W. Pickett's conjecture that 'certain characteristics of the ancient Syrian Christians in South India suggest a mass movement origin'[7] is based on no more than the fact that the Syrians operate very much as a caste, a situation for which several other and more plausible explanations may be offered. Leslie Brown favours the suggestion that 'the first Christian groups in Kerala were foreign traders who settled permanently in the land, and increased their community by marriage and by the baptism of slaves, as well as by indirect evangelism. It seems unlikely that there was ever direct evangelistic preaching.'[8] We are still, of course, in the realm of conjecture, and one wishes Bishop Brown had made it more clear what he means by 'indirect evangelism' and what has led him to speak of the early Syrian Christians baptizing their slaves – a way of proceeding at variance with the principles of caste, especially if it involved integrating slaves into their masters' community.

Unfortunately we know with certainty hardly anything about the origins and early history of the Malabar church. We cannot say whether it was a substantial immigrant group of traders who became established in the country and made attempts to evangelize, or whether the church was in fact formed largely of converts from various Hindu castes. Such evidence as is afforded by tradition is ambivalent and would suggest that the Syrian church was originally evangelistic among the higher castes and was reinforced numerically from time to time by waves of Christian immigration from the Persian Gulf. If, as seems possible, an initial evangelistic eagerness gradually dried up as the Christians became assimilated to a caste society, occasional conversions as the result of inter-marriage with Hindu castes of roughly equivalent status probably continued sporadically, and would account for the fact that some Syrian families insistently claim a Nair or Nambudiri origin.

(ii) Syrian Christians as a Caste

When the West rediscovered the Malabar church in the sixteenth century it was already encapsulated in Hindu society. Christians were regarded as a caste and had a recognized place in the caste hierarchy. In contrast with Christian converts elsewhere in India who were reckoned, whatever their caste origin, to have slipped out of the bottom of the caste system, the Syrians were accorded a high status within the system. In most parts of Kerala they ranked after the Brahmans, roughly equal to the Nairs, although some Syrians claimed that Brahman blood in their ancestry made them indubitably superior to the Nairs.[9] Nor was it only in accepting a particular place within the caste hierarchy that the Syrian Christians operated as a caste. Their relations with other groups were governed by rules which were in no way influenced by their Christian beliefs, and they recognized and observed the whole apparatus of pollution. The various low castes were reckoned as polluting by the Syrian no less than by the Nambudiri or Nair. Endogamy was enforced. Social intercourse with the lower castes was banned. Syrians removed pollution by bathing, changing of clothes, and prayer just as did the Nair or the Nambudiri. In addition, the touch of a Syrian was regarded as capable of purifying objects which had become polluted, of neutralizing pollution.[10]

In brief, the caste system seems to have made it possible for Christianity to survive in Kerala, but on condition that it observed the norms of the system, in particular the prohibition on recruitment

from 'other castes', and the acceptance of the rules of a radically hierarchical society. The Syrian Christians, like the Jews of Cochin and the Bene Israel of Bombay, survived and indeed flourished because they accepted the social system within which they found themselves, and observed its norms.[11] The life of the church, the Syriac liturgy in its fulness, and a rounded theology in the Eastern tradition were all maintained, and tolerated by society at large, because no incompatibility was discerned between the Gospel and a social order based on notions of hereditary pollution and purity. There was, as far as can be discovered, no attempt to produce a distinctively Christian legitimization of the caste system; but neither was there any attack on it based on Christian grounds.

The pattern of internal segmentation within the Syrian Christian community is exceedingly complex. The Syrians were (and are) divided into two endogamous groups, the Northists and the Southists: 'Every Christian is either a Northist or a Southist, no matter what his ecclesiastical allegiance may be.... They differ from each other in customs and to some extent in physiognomy, the Southists being fairer.'[12] They form different congregations, and can rarely be persuaded to worship together, but they practise commensalism. Various stories to account for this deep internal division among the Syrian Christians, such as that the immigrant Christians lived in the southern streets of Cranganur while the converts lived to the north of the town, or that the Southists are the descendants of Thomas Cana and his Syrian wife while the Northists are descended from his Indian wife or concubine, fail to carry conviction since a precisely parallel division into Southists and Northists exists among the Nambudiri Brahmans.[13]

Other divisions among the Syrians result from schisms, some of them induced by outside influences. The Portuguese, when they first came into contact with the church in Malabar, directed their efforts towards ensuring the submission of the Syrian Church to Rome, and the reshaping of its liturgy and order in line with Roman usage, and at the same time it was hoped that they would be able to arouse among the Syrians an eagerness for evangelization. The attempt to reduce the Syrians to conformity with Rome, carried through as it was by a series of able and energetic churchmen backed up by the Portuguese temporal power, was far more successful than the attempt to persuade the Syrians to seek converts from outside their own community. The submission of the Syrians was grudging and led eventually to a major split within the community, that between the orthodox and the Romo-Syrians. The Romo-Syrians continue to

have a Syriac rite closely similar to that of the Orthodox, their social customs are very much the same, and there is intermarriage between the two sects. The most substantial and obvious distinction is one of ecclesiastical allegiance.

The 'Mission of Help' to the Orthodox church established in 1816 was sponsored by the Anglican Church Missionary Society. When the link between the Mission and the Syrian Orthodox Church was dissolved in 1836, a small number of Syrian Christians went with the missionaries and joined the Anglican Church. Their descendants form the Syrian element in the Kerala dioceses of the Church of South India today. The Mission of Help also stimulated a secession of evangelicals from the Orthodox Church, who formed the Mar Thoma Church in 1842. The full story of the sects and schism within the ranks of the Syrian Christians is considerably more complicated than this brief outline would suggest, but we have said enough to describe the main divisions.

The Syrian Christians therefore came to be divided among a number of sects, distinguished from each other by recognizing differing ecclesiastical authorities, and by relatively minor differences in liturgy and theology. It is important to note that despite these sectarian differences, which often give rise to bitter controversy, the Syrian Christians as a whole form one community which has most of the qualities of a caste – endogamy, shared social status in the caste hierarchy, etc. The only internal division which is closely analogous to a subcaste distinction is that between Northists and Southists; the other divisions we have discussed are better regarded as sects.[14] Even today marriages are almost invariably within the community, but not infrequently cross sectarian boundaries. This situation might be compared with that of the Nadars in Tamil Nadu, where marriages between Hindu and Christian Nadars are by no means uncommon, and many families would prefer to contract marriages within the caste but of the other religion rather than with a co-religionist of a different caste or caste-background.

With the conversion of substantial numbers of non-Syrians of low-caste origin to Christianity (a process we will examine in detail later in this chapter) the situation becomes more complex. The convert groups form several 'Christian castes' which retain their earlier lowly position in the caste hierarchy, and relate to Syrian Christians and other groups very much as castes.

(iii) Caste Ideology and Christian Theology

Louis Dumont, as we saw in chapter 1, argues that caste can only properly be understood in the light of an ideology of purity and pollution as the basis of an emphatic distinction between power and status. This ideology, he believes, is inherently Hindu, and cannot be expounded without constant reference to Hindu beliefs. Dumont would therefore, it appears, have problems in interpreting non-Hindu groups within India which operate as castes within the caste system while rejecting the Hindu beliefs which Dumont believes to be fundamental to the working of the caste system. We have suggested that the Syrian Christian community operates very much as a caste, and is properly regarded as a caste, or at least a very caste-like group. Syrian Christians among themselves do not observe the Hindu rules of pollution, and have in their belief system no real justification for regarding some people as inherently pure and others as inherently polluting. They appear not to accept the clear distinction between power and ritual status which is so important for Dumont's theory. It would seem, therefore, that a non-Hindu group can be a caste while rejecting the ideology of caste. Syrian Christians and Hindus may share for the most part a common practice regarding inter-group relations, but at the ideological level their beliefs are sharply differentiated.

It is helpful at this stage to distinguish two rather different things which are commonly put together under the rubric of ideology.[15] On the one hand there is what we call 'theology': the doctrinal and philosophical notions which are usually derived from sacred writings developed systematically and handed down primarily by religious professionals. As examples of theology, selected at random, we might instance the doctrine of the Trinity in Christianity, and the theory of *karma* in Hinduism. Such doctrines may be regarded by the priestly class as constitutive of the religious system, but it is not uncommon for the rank and file of the appropriate religious community to be ignorant of them, to fail to understand them, or even positively to reject them. On the other hand we have 'operative norms', the principles on which the behaviour of members of the group is in fact based. The relation of theology to operative norms is a variable one. It would appear that in the case of the Syrian Christians their inter-group behaviour and the operative norms which govern it are hardly distinguishable from those of their Hindu fellows, although the theological differences remain very strongly marked. It may be that these operative norms are indeed, as Dumont

would argue,[16] so closely associated with, as to be virtually indistinguishable from, Hindu theological ideas. But there is abundant ethnographical evidence to show that the operative norms of caste survive in full force among Hindus even when the specific theological notions with which they are said by Dumont to be connected are rejected or unknown,[17] and Dumont himself admits that among Muslims and Christians in India caste exists 'in more or less attenuated forms.'[18] But what of Christianity, whose theology affirms egalitarian values and does not recognize the principles of caste? Fuller argues that 'the egalitarian aspects of Christianity, as of Islam and Buddhism, have had negligible effect on the Hindu way of life'[19] – and he seems to believe that the Syrian Christians have in the matter of caste relations adopted this 'Hindu way of life'. Dumont similarly believes that caste attitudes among Christians in India have shown a remarkable persistence: 'they have survived a partial change in the set of beliefs, and an imported religious belief, whose ideological implications remain little developed, has been impotent against them.'[20]

Our immediate purpose is not to question this exceedingly one-sided picture of the relation of caste and Christianity, but to examine the interaction of Christian theology and the operative norms of caste within Kerala in modern times, when the coming of western missionaries, particularly the Protestants among them, led to a renewed emphasis on the egalitarian elements in Christian theology, and steady pressure on the Syrian Christians to bring their social behaviour more closely into line with a strongly egalitarian theology. At the practical level the problem was raised unavoidably as the result of recruitment of converts from the low castes, and the resultant problems of behaviour within the Christian community. This has challenged, and continues to question, the traditional patterns of social behaviour among Syrian Christians.

(iv) The Egalitarian Challenge

What is the relation of the Church and caste? If the church vigorously recruits from outside its traditional ranks, it is offending against a fundamental tenet of the caste system, unless new converts are separately organized in ecclesiastical bodies the boundaries of which follow the old contours of caste. And are hierarchical relationships following the operative norms of caste acceptable among Christians? Are there operative norms for social behaviour which can, and should, be derived from Christian theology? Such questions could no

longer be avoided when the Syrian Christians encountered missionaries from a very different Christian tradition – first the Portuguese, and then the English – who put varying kinds of pressure on them to accept a more egalitarian theology, to evangelize, and to conform to new patterns of behaviour.

The Portuguese were not successful in persuading the Syrians to become missionaries, and realizing the hopelessness of this task, themselves turned to the evangelization of the Malabar coast. St. Francis Xavier was but the best known of a series of remarkable Portuguese missionaries who laboured sacrificially among the non-Syrians and converted considerable numbers, particularly, but not exclusively, from the lower castes such as the Illuvans, Mukkuvans, and Pulayas.[21] But the most substantial Portuguese missionary success was the conversion of virtually the whole of the Paravar, or Fisherman, caste on the southern tip of the peninsula.[22] The new converts accordingly became unambiguously separate Latin Christians and no attempt was made to integrate them with the Syrian Church.[23] They are themselves divided into three endogamous groups, the Seven Hundred, the Five Hundred, and the Three Hundred, who vie with each other about their relative status and sometimes support their pretensions by claiming that they are in fact Syrian Christians who have at some stage chosen to join the Latin Church. Such claims are deeply resented or ridiculed by the Syrians, for even the Romo-Syrians keep strictly aloof from the Latins and assert vehemently that the latter retain the low status of their forefathers.[24] There is thus among Christians in Kerala a process closely analogous to M.N. Srinivas's 'sanskritization' taking place which one might call 'syrianization'. Although one has to say that the Syrians normally effectively rebut claims to Syrian status by other Christian groups, the fact that attempts are made with great persistence encourages conjectures about possible recruitment in the past into the Syrian community from below. In particular, it may be noted that while group pretensions to enhanced status may be foiled, effective safeguards against individuals 'passing' as members of a higher group are difficult to devise or enforce.

The first Protestant to display much interest in the Syrian Christians was Dr. Claudius Buchanan, the Vice-Provost of the College of Fort William, who visited Kerala in 1806 to find out at first hand about the church of which he had heard so many rumours. Buchanan reported that the Syrian Church was a church which maintained apostolic purity and simplicity in spite of persistent attempts by the Romans to pervert it and its own enjoyment of a

degree of ritual offensive to Buchanan's taste. He learned from a Syrian priest that the Syrians ranked next to the Nairs, 'the nobility of the country', and had pointed out to him a 'Namboory Brahmin' convert who was now a Syrian priest. But Buchanan's informants agreed with him that the Church had fallen on evil days: 'We have ... converts from time to time', they told him, 'but in this Christian duty we are not so active as we once were; besides, it is not so creditable now to become Christian, in our low estate.' Buchanan understood the mission of the Church almost entirely in terms of the translation and distribution of the Scriptures. He found the Syrians eager to have more Bibles for themselves, and he believed that if he could press through his proposal for some kind of union or at least concordat between the Syrians and the Church of England, then the Syrians would be used as 'instruments of illuminating the Southern part of India, by engaging them in translating their Scriptures into the Native Languages.'[25] The same year, 1806, the non-denominational London Missionary Society started work in south Travancore, encouraged by Colonel Colin Macaulay, the first Resident. The work of the L.M.S. was largely in the Tamil-speaking areas and their contacts with the Syrian Christians were at first negligible.[26] Macaulay was succeeded as Resident by another evangelical, John Munro, who appealed to the Church Missionary Society to send missionaries to work for the reformation of the Jacobite Syrians and possibly later to seek influence with the Romo-Syrians as well. The 'Mission of Help' was established in 1816 'to seek, without proselytizing, the restoration of primitive doctrine and *missionary energy* in a church so advantageously planted and so wonderfully preserved for many centuries in a Hindu country.'[27]

The Mission of Help initially limited itself very strictly to assisting the Syrians and attempting to spark off a reformation within the church. The missionaries were fairly cordially received and it was understood that they were neither interested in recruiting Syrians into the Church of England nor in themselves evangelizing outside the bounds of the Syrian community. Munro backed up the efforts of the C.M.S. in every way he could, particularly by encouraging the Syrians to enter government service for the first time. The provision of such new opportunities for the Syrians and the confirmation of their status thereby effected were, he felt, the necessary conditions for 'the diffusion of genuine Christianity in India' which was 'equally important to the interests of humanity and to the stability of our power.'[28] With this in view, he arranged for 'more than two hundred' Syrians to be appointed to posts under government, some as judges and others in more lowly capacities.

The relationship between the Mission for Help and the Syrian church was not without its tensions from the very beginning. The missionaries felt hampered and restricted by the prohibition of direct evangelism among Hindus, and as it became obvious that the Syrians were not at all eager to reform their church or launch missionary campaigns the missionaries began to look eagerly towards the Hindus who were excluded from the Syrian churches and could not be received by the missionaries. The missionaries complained to the Archdeacon of Madras in 1830 that 'they have no means at present of admitting the heathen to the services of our Church or the preaching of God's word which they are very desirous of attending ... They cannot at present receive converts into our Church by baptism. Many are desirous of admission and would prefer our Church to the Syrian, and in the present state of that Church, it is much to be deplored that we do not have the power of receiving them.'[29] The situation was somewhat complicated by the fact that the C.M.S. mission at Alleppy was not regarded as part of the Syrian mission and already concerned itself with gathering converts from heathenism into the Church of England. But even here a great deal of caution was exercised. Norton of Alleppy wrote in 1819: 'I earnestly pray, and cannot but hope, that the Lord will render every means used for his glory effectual to the salvation of numbers. I say to the salvation of numbers, because we cannot be satisfied with mere proselytes, destitute of the principle of Divine grace in the heart ... I long, therefore, for real, sincere, scriptual holy converts, turning by the influence of the Holy Spirit from dumb idols to serve the living and true God ... I might have baptized many, but for above reasons, I could not in conscience do it. One wanted a good place, another support, and none ... desiring the one thing needful.'[30] The Alleppy mission's first converts from Hinduism were baptized in 1821, and there is a good deal to suggest that the missionaries already realized that there would be problems both with depressed class converts themselves and concerning the relationship of the converts to the Syrians. The missionaries of the Mission of Help kept closely, if increasingly reluctantly, to their strictly limited remit. But the Syrians found their work less helpful and more irritating as the years went by. The missionaries not only resented the limitations placed upon them, but began to regard the cause – the reform and revitalization of the Jacobite Church – as hopeless.

The break came in 1836, when the Orthodox Metropolitan dissolved the relationship with the C.M.S. But it was a separation by mutual consent. A tiny handful of Syrians went with the

missionaries, who henceforth felt free to turn to the Ezhavas, to hill tribes, and the 'slave castes' while dealing with individual Syrians as potential converts to Anglicanism rather than attempting to influence the Orthodox Church as a whole.[31] Although the formal link was now broken, the C.M.S. continued to have more influence in the Orthodox Church than they suspected. The efforts of the C.M.S. to convert Hindus and to labour for the poorest of society was seen by Syrians both as distasteful and, rather paradoxically, as an example to emulate. Yet the missionaries had their own problems after 1836, and were deeply divided among themselves as to the desirability of baptizing sizable numbers of Pulayas. Experienced missionaries such as Henry Baker and Joseph Peet warned against such a policy, arguing that it would make quite impossible the alternative of gaining Brahmans and Nairs by working through Anglican-Syrian congregations. Pulaya converts would, Baker argued 'continue a separate class for generations to come.'[32] Peet and Baker may well have forseen real problems which would arise from directing attention towards the slave castes. But their cautious and diplomatic strategy did not find general favour, and the mission turned to the 'slaves'.

'The position of the slave castes', writes Jeffrey, 'was in fact so debased that they were little touched by the rapid changes of the late nineteenth century which affected most other sections of Travancore society. In the 1890s accusations about slave-holding were still made, and in 1918 a leading Nair could refer unconsciously to 'Pulaya slaves' and conclude that 'the pulayas ... have mostly remained serfs ...' Conversion to Christianity was their only road to improvement; but they had so little to offer – their resources both of status and of material things were non-existent – that some missionaries were relucant to accept them, for they felt that slave-caste converts would lower the prestige of the church and make it far more difficult to retain Syrians or to convert members of the respectable castes.'[33] Work among the slaves and other low castes aroused a great deal of suspicion. In particular it was felt that the schools which the missions opened for the low castes would inevitably challenge the social order. The Rev. George Mattan, an Anglican pastor of Syrian origin, reported in 1851 that 'strong fears exist among all classes of people, that the enlightenment of slaves will be followed by their liberation, and the consequent ruin of the interests of agriculture. We are therefore being regarded as enemies to the best interests of the country.'[34] Even Syrians argued that education of slaves was indeed 'the ruin of the country' because educated slaves were no longer

submissive.[35] The missionaries started a campaign to publicize the plight of the Travancore slaves throughout the Empire and a high-caste backlash was already underway in the 1850s. Converts refused to observe pollution rules and the missionaries strenuously backed them in the resulting conflicts.[36] But the missionaries were not themselves totally consistent: even while fighting for the rights of the slaves, they were notably reluctant to accept low-caste candidates for baptism – the first Pulaya was baptized in the C.M.S. only in 1854[37] – and for a long time they tolerated separate congregations for Syrians and low-caste converts. Furthermore, almost all the C.M.S. teachers and pastors were Syrians, and it was not till 1887 that the first low-caste clergyman, a third-generation Christian whose origin has been Ezhava, was ordained. He 'passed' as a Syrian, and his origin was kept as quiet as possible.[38] By the 1880s there were some 16,000 C.M.S. Christians, of whom more than half were of Pulaya stock and roughly a quarter were Syrians. The remainder were mainly from the Ezhavas and other low castes.[39]

The toleration of separate congregations was always regarded as a temporary expedient and the missionaries kept up steady, and largely unproductive, pressure on the Syrians to admit converts to their congregations, or themselves worship at least from time to time in non-Syrian churches. The overall missionary strategy seems to have been to claim for the converts the status and privileges enjoyed by the Syrians; but neither the Syrians nor the surrounding society saw fit to countenance this policy. What appeared on the face of it to be a claim for enhanced status for converts within the caste system was recognized for what it really was: an attempt to disrupt the system from within.

A picture of the situation in the mid-1860s emerges from the C.M.S. missionaries' replies to the Bishop of Madras's inquiries about caste observances. The Rev. H. Baker, Sr., stationed at Kottayam, reported: 'At Mallapalli there is one Syrian congregation, two of Western Poolaries, and another of Eastern, each a mile or two apart from each other. They are strongly opposed to inter-communion. At Thalawaddi there is a Syrian congregation with two or three Chogans in it, but a *slave* Chapel exists a few hundred yards across the river. On a few slave converts entering the door of the *Church* at the instance of the Missionary, the old Syrians left by the windows ... At Pallam, Kolatta and Erecaste, the Syrians would not allow me to introduce Chogan converts 15 years ago. The difficulty is now over, and at the two latter even Pariah converts partake of the Holy Communion with the rest but in many small congregations the

worshippers are exclusively of *one tribe* or caste ... Nair officials and Brahmin landlords have so much power over a rural population in this heathen and independent country, that in many cases *utter ruin* would follow on a hasty union of Sudras, Syrians, Chogans, etc., with Pooliars and Pariahs.' In Alleppy they had instituted love-feasts, 'but the converts from the Pulaya or slave caste do not attend the same love-feast as the other converts'! The Rev. J. Eapen reported from Lallapalli that 'The Communicants ... from the Syrian, Nair and Chogan castes do not eat together with those from the Poolaya and Pariah castes. They live in separate villages and have prayer houses of their own.' And the Rev. G. Matthan summed up the situation thus: 'The slave converts form a separate body, with whom the rest of the Christians have no social intercourse.'[40]

The Roman Catholic hierarchy continued to hope for large-scale group conversions and their strategy involved substantial differences in evangelistic approach to different castes and virtually complete social and ecclesiastical separation between the major groups within the church. The Roman bishops in Kerala until well into the twentieth century were foreigners – a situation much resented by the Romo-Syrians although it is probable that the Latin Catholics regarded this as something of a safeguard against Syrian dominance in the Church as a whole. The isolation of the various Roman Catholic groups from each other probably contributed to the absence of acute rivalry between the Romo-Syrians and the rest, but rivalry there was, and the policy did not bear the fruits of large-scale group-conversions which had once been expected from it. For a variety of reasons, some of them political, the separation between the various factions or sects is being increasingly challenged today and many feel that the Roman policy of separation has simply delayed the resolution of rather fundamental problems concerning the proper structure of the Christian community.

The London Missionary Society concentrated its work in southern Travancore and in particular on the Tamil-speaking parts of the state. There was only a nominal Syrian population in the London Mission's area, and those few Syrians who joined the L.M.S. were integrated fairly easily into a church which was utterly dominated by Nadar mass-movement converts. The C.M.S. on the other hand, came to Malabar specifically to work with the Syrian Church and established its mission stations in the Syrian homeland around Tiruvalla and Kottayam. The C.M.S. missionaries' disappointment at the Orthodox Church's failure to react as they had hoped to their efforts looks a little strange now since a substantial number of

Syrians joined the C.M.S., the very vigorous and evangelistic Mar Thoma Church was a direct result of the work of the C.M.S., and even the continuing Orthodox Church was more substantially affected than appeared at the time. When the C.M.S. began to seek direct converts from Hinduism the missionaries were to some extent divided as to where to direct their efforts. If high castes, such as the Nambudiris and Nairs, were to be the primary source from which converts were to come, it was felt that conversions from the low castes should not be encouraged lest they reduced the attraction of the church for the higher castes. On the other hand, the remarkable mass movement among Nadars in south Travancore and Tinnevelly District in Madras suggested that it might be wise to concentrate on the lower castes. This, in practice, is what happened. If one discounts the Syrians, there were few from upper caste background in the C.M.S. mission, but increasingly large numbers from a variety of low-caste groups. However, the missionaries' hopes of a substantial mass movement similar to that among the Tamil Nadars were unfulfilled.[41]

(v) Relations of Syrians to Converts in Modern Times

The contemporary situation within the Kerala churches has been summed up thus by Ninan Koshy: 'The most dominant characteristic and the chief contributing factor of inter-caste tensions in the Kerala Church is the exclusiveness of the Syrian Christians as a distinct caste and their apparent determination to perpetuate this.'[42] In view of their acceptance of caste status, it is hardly surprising that the Syrians were not notably committed to evangelism, for the attempt to recruit members for one's own caste from other castes is a fundamental offence against the principles of the caste system. Most Syrians seemed to regard membership of caste or religious community as a kind of *character indelebilis* which was in no way affected by faith, or lack of it, or change of faith. If an Ezhava, say, became a Christian, he was usually considered by the Syrian Christian no less than by the Nambudiri Brahman to remain an Ezhava and therefore a source of pollution. When conversions from the lower castes to Christianity became relatively common in the nineteenth century, incidents such as this, recounted by the Rev. Jacob Chandy, Sr., a C.M.S. pastor and himself a Syrian, were quite common: 'One of the Ezhava converts said that a Syrian a few days ago pointed out to a Nair who passed by him calling out to the Nair, 'You are defiled, the man whom you passed by is a convert from Chegons.' The Nair got very

angry and used abusive language to him for not giving notice to the Nair that he was a Chegon and for not getting out of the road as Chegons do when they see a Nair. The Syrian was the cause of the disturbance; he acted as if he was in duty bound to see that the higher castes be not defiled by the approach of the lower castes.'[43]

There are, however, significant differences in the intensity and shape of the caste question between the various denominations. Within the Roman Church each of the two rites – the Latin and the Syrian – has its own episcopate, and there are separate Northist and Southist dioceses among the Romo-Syrians. Converts from low-caste background enter the Latin rite and are thus for all practical purposes separate from the Syrians. Some Romo-Syrians are involved in evangelistic activity, but this is mainly among the higher castes such as the Nairs.[44] The various branches of the Roman Church have been constructively concerned for the economic and social well-being of converts, who do not generally feel a deep sense of grievance since their separate ecclesiastical organisation and the fact that their main strength lies in different parts of Kerala from the Syrians limits the possibility of social relations between the two communities. It remains true, however, that there have been virtually no priests ordained in the Latin rite from low-caste background.[45]

The Orthodox are divided into two largely endogamous groups, with different ecclesiastical administrations – there is a separate diocese for the Kyananite (Southist) Orthodox. The Orthodox have started evangelistic work among the backward castes during this century, most of it being carried on under the auspices of the Servants of the Cross Society, founded in 1924. There are now several thousand converts who, it is claimed, are integrated into the normal parochial structure and attend the ordinary services of worship. The converts are, however, in an extremely depressed condition, and although the church provides various forms of paternalistic assistance for them, they are not accorded any kind of equality of status with the Syrians and sometimes feel considerable resentment on this account. There are no non-Syrian priests in the Orthodox Church.[46]

The Mar Thoma Church is the reformed branch of the Syrians which split with the Orthodox largely as a result of the impact of the C.M.S. Mission of Help. One of the issues between the two churches was the question of evangelism among non-Syrians, and occasional injunctions to mission among the low castes from the reforming Mar Athanasius in the mid-nineteenth century were important factors in the split.[47] The Mar Thoma Church has had a very active Evangelistic

Association since 1888, which has sent missionaries to other parts of India as well as evangelizing in Travancore itself.[48] There are rather less than ten thousand low-caste converts in the church who are organized into 'Sabhas' as against the 'Idavakas' of the Syrians. The Sabhas, unlike the Idavakas, are not self-supporting and are managed by agents of the Evangelistic Association. Most Sabhas worship in a building which serves also as a school, and do not regularly have the services of a priest. While the Idavakas elect representatives to church councils, the backward-class converts are represented by a few nominated members, and have very little influence on the policies of the church. Recently a few Sabhas have been upgraded to Idavakas, but there are still no priests of convert background in the Mar Thoma Church.[49] Converts are very rarely accorded equality of esteem or of treatment with Syrians.

The Church of South India has three dioceses in Kerala. The South Kerala diocese covers an area which was formerly a mission field of the London Missionary Society and most members of the church come from one of three social origins – Nadar, Low Caste, or Syrian Christian. Most congregations consist of Christians from only one of these backgrounds, and the diocese has had a policy of allocating pastors and other church workers of the same social background as the members to each congregation. The North Kerala diocese has been remarked upon by observers for its lack of caste problems. This may well be related to the strongly anti-caste stance of the Basel Mission from the very beginning, but no less important is the fact that there are very few Syrian Christians in the diocese. Central Kerala has the most acute problems of the three C.S.I. dioceses and constant friction between Syrians and low-caste converts led in 1964 to a schism in which the Rev. V.J. Stephen led a considerable number of 'backward-class' Christians out of the C.S.I. to form a separate 'C.M.S. Church'. It should be noted that the Church of South India is the only church in Kerala to have ordained a sizeable number of backward-class pastors, and that Mr. V.J. Stephen was the only one of fourteen in the diocese who seceded. Some backward-class clergy have served acceptably in congregations where the majority of the members are Syrians. But it has been generally accepted that the backward-class Christians have a variety of legitimate grievances. The diocese is an area where the C.M.S. showed itself initially very reluctant to baptize low-caste converts, and then delayed ordaining the first convert for fear of offending the Syrians. For many years all scholarships at the C.M.S. College in Kottayam were reserved for 'boys of Syrian parentage attached to the Anglican Church.'[50] An

inquiry set up by the C.S.I. Synod to investigate the problems of the diocese outlined the grievances of the backward-class Christians: 'First and foremost is the feeling that they are despised, not taken seriously, overlooked, humiliated or simply forgotten. They feel that again and again affairs in the diocese are arranged as if they did not exist. Caste appellations are still occasionally used in Church when they have been abandoned even by Hindus. Backward-class desires and claims seem again and again to be put on the waiting list, while projects which they feel aim chiefly at the benefit of the Syrian community seem to get preferential consideration. In appointments, in distribution of charity, in pastoral care and in the attitude shown towards them, in disputes with the authorities the treatment they receive, when compared with that received by their Syrian brothers, suggests a lack of sympathy, courtesy and respect.'[51]

The picture which emerges of relationships between Syrians and New Christians is patchy, and there is much to support the view that caste attitudes and operative norms remain exceedingly strong among the Syrians. But it is also important to note that the expectations of New Christians that they are entitled to equality of treatment within the Church together with the increasingly influential belief that social behaviour should be directly influenced by an egalitarian Christian theology has had significant effects, and continues to disturb and challenge the older attitudes among Syrian Christians. Syrians have increasingly accepted responsibility for evangelistic work – recruitment into the community from outside – and there is in the enlightened sections of the Syrian community considerable unease about the maintenance of social and ecclesiastical customs which perpetuate radical disparities within the church.

(vi) Reactions of New Christians

It is hardly surprising in view of all this that there have been not only schisms but reversions to Hinduism of Christians of low-caste origin, particularly since Independence and the introduction of the attractive apparatus of protective discrimination which is available only to Hindus of the Scheduled Castes. Disappointed expectations of the church and the economic and educational advantages now denied to Christians have together led to reconversion to Hinduism, although the extent to which this has taken place is in doubt. K. C. Alexander speaks of reversions as being on a large scale, but does not back up his statement with any figures.[52] A Pulaya Church, the

Prathyaksha Daiva Sabha (God's Church of Visible Salvation — surely a significant title) was established in the 1930s by a low-caste convert, Poykayil Johannon, who was disillusioned with the failure of the churches to practise equality or tackle the problem of caste. This church now has several thousand members, and there are several other independent Christian sects, most of them pentecostalist, which are composed of depressed-class Christians, vigorously attack caste as unchristian, and are highly suspicious of the Syrians and their dominance in most of the main-line denominations.[53]

In other parts of India where there is not an entrenched and privileged Christian group such as the Syrians, conversion has often appealed to depressed castes as an alternative and more promising road to enhanced status and enlarged opportunity than sanskritization. The missionaries' influence with government was often utilized on behalf of the underprivileged and they offered not only a new self-respect but educational and often economic advantages of various sorts. Conversion appealed as at least an apparent escape from the caste system for those who despaired of achieving improvement of their lot within the system. But in Kerala conversion tended to take the form of 'syrianization' for within the church there was already this dominant group which presented a model for emulation by other Christians. But it was never possible for more than a small number of individuals from other backgrounds to pass as Syrians, and the Syrians reacted on the whole precisely in the manner of a Hindu caste to the pretensions of other groups to equality of status.

We have seen that the shape of the caste issue as it faced Christians was different in Kerala from elsewhere in India because of the presence in the Syrian Christians of a high-status Christian group with most of the qualities of a caste, with a recognised place in the caste hierarchy. The missionary impact set up a considerable disturbance. Protestants in particular tried to impress the Syrians with the desirability of recruiting converts from outside the Syrian community, and in practice most of these converts came from the low castes. This in turn made the problem of social relations between Syrians and low-caste converts peculiarly acute. The Syrian reactions to egalitarian pressures and the aspirations of low-caste converts were varied, but included significant changes in attitudes and behaviour over a period of time.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

1 S. Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore.* London, 1883, Chapter 32.
2 A. Hawksworth, *Day Dawn in Travancore.* Kottayam, 1860, pp. 8-9, cited by Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908.* D.Phil. Thesis, University of Sussex, 1973, p. 23. On 'distance pollution', see C.J. Fuller, *The Nayars Today.* Cambridge, 1976, pp. 43-4.
3 J. H. Hutton, *Caste in India.* Fourth Edition, Bombay, 1963, pp. 79-83.
4 A. Aiyappan, *Social Revolution in a Kerala Village: A Study in Culture Change.* Bombay, 1965, p. 30.
5 L. K. Ananthkrishna Ayyar, *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians.* Ernakulam, 1926, p.2; L.W. Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas.* Cambridge, 1956, p.176.
6 E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India.* Madras, 1909, Vol. V1, pp. 414-5.
7 J. Waskom Pickett, *Christian Mass Movements in India.* Lucknow, 1934, p.37.
8 L. W. Brown, op.cit., p.168.
9 L. W. Brown, op.cit., p.173; Thurston, op.cit. p. 457.
10 C. J. Fuller, 'Kerala Christians and the Caste System', *Man,* (N.S.) II, 63-4; Brown, op.cit., p.172.
11 On the Bene Israel see S. Strizower, *The Children of Israel; The Bene Israel of Bombay.* Oxford, 1971.
12 L. W. Brown, op.cit., p.175; Thurston, p.450.
13 See Thurston, op.cit., pp. 414-5; L. W. Brown, op.cit., pp.175-6.
14 Following Fuller, 'Kerala Christians', pp. 55-56, we differ from Dumont (*Homo Hierarchicus*, p.249) who sees these internal sectarian divisions or 'persuasions' (his term) as 'distinct groups or castes'. He is influenced by his doubtfully correct belief that they 'are mostly endogamous'. As Fuller points out, 'the crucial criterion is not endogamy but recruitment. Is recruitment ascriptive by birth (caste) or by voluntary affiliation (sect)?' One becomes a Syrian by birth, but there is an element of choice in the sect to which one belongs.
15 Cf. the not dissimilar distinction between 'ideology' and 'theology' made by Fuller, following Delfendahl. Fuller, 'Kerala Christians', p.66.
16 Max Weber also sees caste as closely tied to a specifically Hindu ideological legitimization. For him the ideological basis for caste is to be found in the doctrines of *karma* and *dharma*. His whole analysis is much less sophisticated, and easier to fault, than Dumont's. See Max Weber, *The Religions of India.* New York, 1967, Cf. Fuller, 'Kerala Christians', p.65-6.
17 For example, Oscar Lewis, *Village Life in Northern India.* New York, 1965.
18 Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus,* p.257.

19 Fuller, 'Kerala Christians', p.65. This book may be regarded as an extended attempt to question this conclusion.
20 Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, p.25.
21 See E. A. Stewart, *The Life of St. Francis Xavier.* London, 1917, esp. Chaps. 11-14 and 16.
22 For further discussion of the Paravars, see Chapter 4.
23 C. B. Firth, *An Introduction to Indian Church History.* Madras, 1961, p.58; Pickett, op.cit., pp. 37-38.
24 Thurston, op.cit., pp. 446-7; Ananthakrishna Ayyar, op.cit., pp. 255-7, 277-8.
25 Claudius Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia; with Notices of the Translation of the Scriptures into the Oriental Languages.* Third Edition, Edinburgh, 1812, pp. 99-133.
26 Samuel Mateer, *'The Land of Charity': A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People.* London, 1871, Chapter XX.
27 The best account of the early work of the C.M.S. is S.P. Cheriyan, *The Malabar Syrians and the Church Missionary Society, 1816-1840.* Kottayam, 1935. See also Ninan Koshy, *Caste in the Kerala Churches.* Bangalore, 1968, pp. 18-23; Robin Jeffrey, op. cit., pp. 8-9, 20-21.
28 Cited in Jeffrey, op.cit., p. 19.
29 Cited in Cheriyan, op.cit., pp. 205-6.
30 Cited in Cheriyan, p. 133.
31 See Koshy, op.cit., p. 19; Cheriyan, op.cit., Chapters XIX and XX1.
32 Cited in Robin Jeffrey, op.cit., p. 170. These paragraphs are much indebted to this work.
33 R. Jeffrey, op.cit., pp. 41-2.
34 Cited in R. Jeffrey, op.cit., p. 65.
35 Jeffrey, op.cit., p. 48.
36 Jeffrey, op.cit., pp. 62-68.
37 E. Dalton, *Who Thee By Faith.* Kottayam, 1962, p. 115, cited by Jeffrey.
38 Jeffrey, op.cit., p. 171.
39 Jeffrey, op.cit., p. 170.
40 *Inquiries made by the Bishop of Madras Regarding the Removal of Caste Prejudices and Practices in the Native Church of South India; together with the Replies of the Missionaries and Native Clergy sent thereto.* Madras, 1868, pp. 127-142.
41 On this see Chapter four.
42 Ninan Koshy, *Caste in the Kerala Churches.* Bangalore, 1968, p. 51.
43 Cited by Robin Jeffrey, op.cit., p. 12, from Chandy's Journal for 23 November, 1855, in C.M.S. Archives.
44 Abraham M. Nidhiry, *Father Nidhiry: A History of his Times.* Kottayam, 1971, pp. 275-281.
45 Ninan Koshy, op.cit., p. 25; W. L. Jayasingham, 'Intercaste Relations in the Church of Kerala', *Religion and Society,* Vol. X No. 4, 1863, p. 63.

46 Ninan Koshy, op. cit., pp. 25-45; Jayasingham, op. cit., pp., 63-4.
47 Robin Jeffrey, op. cit., p. 148; L. Brown, op. cit., p. 141.
48 F. E. Keay, *A History of the Syrian Church in India.* Madras, 1938, pp. 87-88.
49 Ninan Koshy, op. cit., pp. 24-5, 45; Jayasingham, op. cit., pp. 64-5.
50 C.M.S. Report, 1890. p.18.
51 Koshy, op. cit., pp. 79-80. On the problems of the Central Kerala Diocese in general, see Koshy, op. cit., pp. 23-24 and 76-83; Jayasingham, op. cit., pp. 66-67; M. M. John, 'Silver Jubilee Review of the Diocese of Madhya Kerala', *South India Churchman,* June and July, 1972. It should be noted that the diocesan bishop of Madhya Kerala is now of depressed class origin.
52 K. C. Alexander, 'The Neo-Christians of Kerala', in J. Michael Mahar, ed., *The Untouchables in Contemporary India.* Tucson, 1972, p. 156.
53 Ibid, pp. 156-7.

CHAPTER VI

INDIAN CHRISTIANS' ATTITUDES TO CASTE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

It is far from easy to disinter distinctive attitudes towards the caste system held by Indian Protestant Christians, particularly before the late nineteenth century. For one thing, most of the accessible sources are missionary writings, and one may reasonably expect that these documents emphasize the views of Indians who agreed with the missionary line on caste and were not always absolutely fair and reliable in presenting dissident views. Furthermore, as discipline was tightened in most of the Protestant denominations to make it virtually impossible for converts to be baptized without explicit and public 'breaking of caste', those who diverged from the missionaries' teaching on caste either remained Hindus or joined one of the small Christian or syncretistic sects, most of which have passed into oblivion. In spite of the effectiveness of such techniques of filtering out dissidence, it is surprising how much articulate opposition missionary policy for the suppression of caste encountered, particularly in the older missions where many families had been Christian for generations and had found a more tolerant attitude towards caste observances either from Lutheran missionaries or in the Roman Catholic Church.

Opposition to the missionaries' caste policy tended to come from Christians of Sudra origin rather than from untouchable or high-caste converts. Converts from the lowest castes always saw conversion as in part an escape from the caste system into a new and more flexible social order, while high-caste converts knew perfectly well that in abandoning Hinduism they were inevitably sacrificing their ascriptive social status. In the old South Indian missions there were few converts from the highest castes, but substantial numbers of Sudras who were intent on maintaining social links with their Hindu caste fellows and asserting their social superiority to Christians of low-caste origin. Only if they continue to treat lower-caste Christians as polluting could they maintain their standing in the broader community which the missionaries regarded as Hindu. This was the most vocal section of the Christian community, and from it were drawn most the the 'native clergy', whose attitude towards caste practices tended to be markedly more tolerant than that of most missionaries, and who often quietly failed to implement the most vigorous assaults on caste enjoined on them from above. A

survey such as the Bishop of Madras's *Inquiries ... Regarding the Removal of Caste Prejudices and Practices in the Native Church of South India* of 1868[1] suggests a fairly clear division between missionaries and native clergy, not so much on the unchristian nature and general iniquity of caste observances as on the measures to be taken to combat it. Most of the missionaries (with significant exceptions) were in favour of an all-out onslaught; most of the native clergy indicated that in practice their toleration had fairly wide bounds, and a few of the bolder spirits among them were willing to defend a policy of gradualism. The Rev. D. Savarimoothoo of Vepery reported that 'No measures have been adopted to further the abandonment of the caste distinctions in eating and drinking and in general social intercourse amongst my communicants,'[2] while W. T. Satthianandhan of Madras protested that 'Any harsh measures will tend not only to wound the feelings and give umbrage, but it may also defeat the object which we seek to accomplish.'[3] Other Indian clergy saw the strict caste discipline as strongly discouraging conversions except from the lowest ranks of Hindu society, and as leading many Christians to move into the more tolerant Lutheran or Roman churches.

By the late nineteenth century there was a segment of Indian Christian opinion which was strongly critical of the missionaries, particularly for their lack of understanding and sympathy for Indian culture and indigenous expressions of Christian faith and their general hostility towards the great surge of national feeling. Some of this criticism was directed specifically against the missionary line on caste, which was interpreted as an aggressive attack on Indian social structure which totally lacked an understanding of the merits of the caste system and really had nothing except the probably even more undesirable western class system to put in its place. More cogent, in many ways, was the suggestion that the missionaries had failed quite remarkably to see the bearing of the Christian social ethic they propounded on their own social relations to Indians, and on the imported divisions of the church. Most of this new group of critics were first or second generation converts from high castes who were not clergymen or in the employ of the missions. They had an independence and a standing which enabled them to be very outspoken from time to time, and yet some of their statements have a remarkable balance and authority.

The earliest reliable records of the arguments used by Indian Christians opposed to the missionaries' hard line on caste come from the mid-1820s. When Bishop Heber became aware that caste disputes

were causing bitter disruptions in many of the South Indian churches he consulted a highly experienced and widely respected Indian clergyman, the Rev. Christian David. This man was a Christian from Tanjore, who had spent some time in Ceylon before settling in Calcutta, and he knew the southern churches well and had been at pains to keep in touch with them. Heber was clearly much puzzled how to respond to various appeals which had come to him from dissident Christians in Vepery, Tanjore and other places, complaining that the missionaries were interfering with their customs and practices needlessly and arrogantly. Heber asked David whether the dissidents 'object to intercourse with the Pariars on any superstitious ground of *caste,* or simply because these last are mostly *poor*, and belonging to the *meaner rank of society*?'[4] Heber found it hard to see any really substantial difference between the European notions of class which were perfectly acceptable to him, and the practices which the missionaries were trying to suppress as heathenish. But there was something in the tone and content of the petitions which he had received from dissidents in the South which made him uneasy: the supplicants 'seemed puffed up above their brethren', and regard fellow Christians 'as if they were another species'. And what is worse, they implied threats to leave the church if their demands were not met! Heber invited David to explain the intricacies of this controversy and its past history, and suggest how the Bishop might deal with the matter.

Christian David's response[5] was careful, even guarded, but there was no doubt that he came down on the side of the dissidents rather than the missionaries. Caste, he wrote, is the only notion of rank understood and accepted by most Indians, but is in itself in no way superstitious. Caste ranking is different in kind from ranking in terms of wealth or occupation: a wealthy Pariah who has given up the degrading occupations traditional to his caste, remains a Pariah and those of higher caste, Christian or Hindu, will not associate with him. The one exception is the Pariah who becomes a scholar or a *guru*: he will be respected, listened to, and admitted to high-caste circles, although 'they will not eat food out of the same dish with him'. It thus happens that low-caste catechists are 'listened to with deference and attention' by caste Christians, although they are not socially acceptable beyond very narrow limits. Because of their customary occupations and habits the Pariahs, even Christian Pariahs, are 'feared as a source of contamination by even the Christian native of India'. There then follows an account of the mild policy with regard to caste followed by the earlier missionaries from Ziegenbalg to

Kohlhof: while deploring caste observances they made concessions to the prejudices of the weaker brethren. As a consequence, 'the feelings in question with the practices resulting from them, were visibly losing ground'. More recently younger missionaries had sponsored an aggressive attack on caste which went hand in hand with disparagement of the older missionaries and their achievements, a policy of innovation which was felt as an unwarranted disturbance by the vast body of the Indian Christians.

David's recommendation was that the Bishop should in effect reprimand the 'junior Missionaries' for their impetuosity and disregard for the customs and feelings of their congregations, while at the same time addressing a pastoral letter to the converts 'explaining to them from scripture, the utter opposition of all proud notions of *caste* to the *Gospel,* and intimating the earnest wish of their European instructors to remove this, with as little offence as possible to any of their national feelings or prejudices, without touching any just and proper distinction of rank, education, or degree in society.' Furthermore, the Bishop might well remind the Pariahs and those of lower caste that 'as Christianity had an evident proper tendency to elevate them with respect to themselves and their countrymen, they should carefully abstain from every expression or habit ... which might have a tendency to excite disgust and dislike in their higher brethren; reminding them also of that necessary regard and deference which Christianity not only allows, but *commands* to be paid to our *superiors* in knowledge or wordly respectability, and of the special directions of St. Paul addressed to Christian slaves against the contempt of their Christian masters.'

Christian David's argument had its own subtlety and clearly had a determinative influence on Heber's thinking on the issue. Caste, he suggested, was essentially a civil distinction closely parallel to European — and Christian — notions of rank. Observance of caste did not affect adversely the life of the church and the private social *mores* of converts were not the legitimate concern of the missionaries. The impetuosity of young missionaries and the restless insubordination of low-caste converts were the real causes of trouble, and so far were these things from being sactioned by the Gospel that the Bishop should intervene to restore a proper order including at least some caste observance to the churches. While David urges the Bishop to explain 'from scripture, the utter opposition of all proud notions of caste to the Gospel' he himself provides no such arguments; indeed he argues from scripture that some 'notions of caste' (presumably excluding 'proud notions') are legitimate, if not

desirable. By maintaining the distinction of civil and religious and allocating caste firmly to the category of the civil, David challenges by implication the missionary argument that caste is a relic of Hinduism which can subtly penetrate and destroy Christian faith, and always provides a possibility of return to the Hindu fold. Caste is not idolatry, it is not heathenish. While it may have defects and be subject to perversion, as a social order it is not more basically antithetical to Christianity than any other social order. Just below the surface there lurks the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms, and Luther's declaration of the autonomy of the secular.

The line of argument presented by Christian David in 1824 clearly lies behind the opposition encountered by Bishop Daniel Wilson in his Visitation of Tanjore in 1835. A substantial part of the Tanjore church had resisted the missionaries' attack on caste, now supported by unequivocal episcopal injunctions, to the point of schism. The Tanjore church was an old one, which had been originally Lutheran and later transferred to the Church of England. A large proportion of the Christians were Sudras whose families had been Christian for several generations and who had Lutheran or Roman Catholic backgrounds, and hence experience of a milder discipline on the issue of caste. Here was a native Christian community with a mind of its own, with a recognized standing in society which they felt was now in jeopardy, and with well-educated spokesmen perfectly capable of sustaining a theological argument in English, and with a far more detailed understanding of Hinduism and Indian culture than most missionaries possessed. They saw the hard line on caste as innovative, disturbing, and based on no adequate theological grounds. The younger missionaries were rejecting as idolatrous practices they did not wholly understand and their policies would surely have dire consequences for the Church. The Tanjore dissidents' allegiance to the Bishop was somewhat conditional: they were perfectly prepared to argue with him face to face because they knew that the only view of the situation which had been adequately presented to him was that of the missionaries and they believed they had custom, the example of the missionary patriarchs, scripture, and common sense on their side. If the Bishop would not listen to them, they knew that they could well continue as Christians but outside the Church of England. Already seventeen hundred Sudras had left the church, and many more could follow their example.

The discussion between Daniel Wilson and the Tanjore dissidents is recounted in Wilson's *Life* in great detail, the arguments being reconstructed from shorthand notes taken at the time.[6] Even after the

process of transcription, translation, and incorporation into a missionary Bishop's biography, some of the arguments against the Bishop's declared policy seem very cogent, and the attempts to respond to them rather ineffective. The critics emphasize that the caste distinctions which they are concerned to defend are civil rather than religious and are closely analogous to European notions of rank, degree and class. In failing to recognize any distinction between civil and religious aspects of social order the younger missionaries had found themselves committed to an ill-considered and virtually all-inclusive attack on all things Indian. Not only caste distinctions but the *kudumi* (topknot), the use of garlands at marriages, the use of Indian musical instruments in church, and so forth were rejected out of hand. Wilson differed from Heber in refusing to recognize that caste had a civil, and therefore religiously unobjectionable side, but he had at the same time to defend the view that the hierarchical structure of the church and European rank were *not* purely civil but integral to Christian Faith. The dissidents were not slow to point out that this was not the understanding of the faith into which they had been baptized and that if the Bishop were correct in asserting that Christianity was in radical conflict with virtually any expression of caste, it must surely follow that European notions of rank were not wholly agreeable to the Gospel. One native priest offered to conform if he were permitted to communicate before the people of whatever caste. Since he was a priest, to do this was his right and privilege, and Wilson gladly approved.[7] But clearly the Bishop was here endorsing caste scruples in the guise of 'benefit of clergy', not only offering a loophole in his own position but raising the question whether the two notions of rank were as totally different as his argument assumed.

In the South the anti-Brahman feeling which was widely diffused among the 'Sudra castes' served to reinforce the idea that caste was not in its essence a matter of religion. Dislike of the Brahmans' social, religious and educational dominance expressed itself in the belief that the Brahmans in establishing their hegemony had changed an indigenous caste system which was reasonably fluid and entirely civil or secular into a rigid and inflexible system which served through the indiscriminate use of religious sanctions to maintain and secure the Brahmanical dominance. Those who rejected Brahmanical Hinduism, the theory ran, thereby abandoned religious caste and were left in an unexceptionable civil caste system which was in fact the indigenous social order of the country which had been perverted by the Brahmans. This view is found not only among Sudra Christians, but was widespread among Hindu Sudras as well in the

early nineteenth century, although in this period Christian Sudras often appeared as spokesmen for the non- Brahman castes in general. The Sudras found that their route to improvement was blocked by the entrenched pre-eminence of the Brahmans. Both Christian and Hindu Sudras were attempting to 'debrahmanize' the caste system, secure in the hope that they would then be able to rise and enhance their position. The Pariah converts, on the other hand, saw the caste-maintaining behaviour of the Sudra Christians as the great obstacle to their advancement, and being themselves still inarticulate, they looked to the missionaries as their spokesman.

The Tanjore dissidents were emphatic on the importance of maintaining their caste as the only basis on which they could maintain social contact with their Hindu neighbours. If they broke caste they would cease to be respected by the Hindus and would be cut off from all intercourse with them. Hindus would no longer employ them (this point was made by one Awasagayahm who had been mission doctor) and respectable marriages would be virtually impossible to arrange.[8] The women were on the whole the more adamant in maintaining caste, but if Christianity is to spread 'it must not be made difficult, and subject its converts to persecution.' Such attitudes might glibly be dismissed as proud and cowardly, but the dissidents were making a valid point. Carey and the Baptists had distinguished more clearly than other Protestant missionaries between caste as an integral part of Hinduism which must be given up on conversion, and Indian culture which should be strongly affirmed by converts, and used as the basis for maintaining contact with non-Christian neighbours. The Tanjore dissidents felt that the missionaries were asking too much of them, and inviting them to face persecution and all sorts of social disabilities simply because they had been denationalized at the time of conversion. Devasagyam told the Bishop, 'We do not mind being called professors of the religion of God: but we do not like to be called Pariahs.' The Bishop's policy, the dissidents felt, would inevitably discourage conversions by putting unnecessary stumbling blocks in the way of the Hindu inquirer. And in this they were partly right, for the later 'mass movements' among the Depressed Classes clearly showed that it was castes which did not follow the Bishop's advice to 'have nothing to do with heathens' and maintained both their own cohesion within the church and their contacts with their Hindu caste fellows which produced the largest number of converts. Yet the Bishop and the younger missionaries were strongly motivated by nervousness: hundreds of Christians were reported to be reverting to Hinduism in

the south each year, and a substantial part of the southern congregations was in virtual schism. The dissidents blamed the innovative policy on caste; the missionaries felt that caste always held open the door for reversions, but they seemed in some of their statements more anxious to secure the converts in the church as in a prison than to gather the heathen into the fold.[9] Only when the necessity is demonstrated from Scripture, the dissidents averred, will they give up caste or communicate with Pariahs; meanwhile they remain to be convinced of the necessity or desirability of the missionaries' policy.

Ten years after Daniel Wilson's visitation of Tanjore a discussion on caste took place in Madras among a group of young converts attached to the Free Church of Scotland's Institution in Madras. The tone and tendency of this discussion was radically different from the Tanjore debate: this time the Indian Christians wholeheartedly and most intelligently supported a strong line against caste, and their arguments demonstrated both a remarkable understanding of western culture and a very much more detailed and sophisticated understanding of Hinduism and the true nature of caste than had been demonstrated by most of the missionary protagonists in the caste debate. The caste issue had become a live one in Madras as part of the Hindu community was agitating vigorously against the enactment of the so-called *lex loci* whereby converts were assured the right to inherit property.[10] Now John Anderson, the founder of the Institution, posed five questions on caste to six of his converts.[11] The questions were: (1) Is Caste inseparably connected with Hinduism, or is it not? (2) Can Caste with truth be called a civil distinction, chiefly designed to preserve a family from deterioration by intermarriage with other families? (3) Do our native Free Church brethren regard Caste as part and parcel of idolatry, and of all heathen abominations? (4) Is the idea of pollution in the Hindu mind separable from the system of Caste, or not? (5) Can Caste be compared for a moment with the European distinctions in society?

The converts set to answer these, somewhat loaded, questions were a remarkable group of men. All of them had been baptized while students in Anderson's school and they came from prosperous high-caste families. C. Viswanathan was a 'Jaina Brahman', P. Rajajgopaul 'a Moodeliar of respectable family', A. Venkataramiah was the grandson of the Registrar of the petty court.[12] About half of them were recognized as candidates for the ministry and were undergoing the equivalent of the full Scottish Arts and Divinity curriculum of the time; all were soundly educated and able men who

had themselves at baptism renounced caste and adopted the Calvinist theology of their Scottish mentors. In addition, most of them – particularly C. Viswanathan and S.P. Ramanoojooloo – knew Hindu thought and Hindu society from the inside and could document their case in a way the missionaries never could. Ramanoojooloo had been a long time in a state of indecision before seeking baptism, and after baptism he had returned to the Hindu fold for a long period before finally settling in the Free Church. Perhaps he wondered why Christians, in disowning caste, should erect a barrier between themselves and the Hindus which was itself so similar to a caste division. C. Viswanathan was greatly to distress Anderson and his colleagues by suddenly embracing Rome in 1849 – scarcely less of an apostasy in their eyes than reversion to Hinduism. One may conjecture that he was perhaps the first to glimpse the ecumenical implications of the anti-caste stance, and to notice the extraordinary blindness of virtually all missionaries to the question mark they were raising against their own denominational differences by their attack on caste.

It is worth emphasizing the fact that the six 'Free Church native brethren' were high-caste converts, superior in terms of the traditional ranking to the mass of the Sudra Christians who provided the main opposition to the missionaries' line on caste. They knew that for them conversion could not but involve the loss of all traditional ascriptive standing, and looked rather superciliously at the efforts of some of their Sudra fellow-Christians to maintain their place in the caste hierarchy and lord it over their Pariah Christian brothers. Converts of low-caste origin had found advancement in conversion, but hung on to caste observances as a kind of insurance against falling still lower. High-caste converts knew they could only fall in social esteem, and despised those who were unwilling to make a similar sacrifice. The break with caste at the time of conversion, they affirmed, was final and irreversible. Within Hinduism, a change of philosophy or of the god a man worships is often possible but change of caste is impossible and breach of caste intolerable. Caste is the Achilles' heel of Hinduism: 'Hence anything that strikes at the heart of Caste reaches also a deadly blow to Hinduism; for Caste is the chief corner-stone on which the whole of Hinduism rests, it is the strong pillar which supports and perpetuates Hindu idolatry.'[13] The suggestion that caste is primarily a civil rather than a religious institution gets short shrift from all the contributors to the discussion. It is very cogently pointed out that Hindus do not make this distinction, which is in itself artificial and in practice impossible

to maintain. Venkataramiah affirms that 'Caste and religion are synonymous'.[14] European distinctions of rank, on the other hand, are primarily civil although they have been modified by Christianity – there is here a more sophisticated account of the relation of religion and social order in Europe than is common in missionary polemics of the period. But this leaves open the possibility that if any elements in the caste system can be accurately distinguished as civil and disentangled from Hinduism, they may be acceptable to Christians. Indeed 'we cannot deny that Caste has in it something of a civil nature. But whatever was the design of its originators in this respect, it soon became chiefly a religious institution.'[15] Possibly we have here an echo of what we encountered in Tanjore, the suggestion that the Brahmans converted an unobjectionable caste system into a rigid, idolatrous ordering of society calculated to maintain their own pre-eminence. Yet on the whole the writers feel that it is profitless to attempt to disentangle caste as religious and caste as civil, for 'as the soul is connected with the body, so Caste is connected with Hinduism.'[16]

Caste, we are told, militates against ordinary acts of humanity such as are enjoined upon men in Scripture and is a standing denial of love and humility. It draws people away from true religion to idolatry and is subversive of the fundamentals of Christianity: 'If you admit Caste to be true, the whole fabric of Christianity must come down; for the nature of Caste and its associations destroy the first principles of Christianity. Caste makes distinctions among creatures where God had made none; it attaches moral impurity where God does not; and makes one class of men clean and another unclean, in direct opposition to the word of God, to fact, and to the actual state of the world.'[17] (Rajahgopaul). As a good Presbyterian, Ettirajaloo is no respecter of bishops: Bishop Heber may have approved of caste, 'but this Bishop, though a very learned and amiable person, was not well informed on this subject. Even supposing he had been better informed, his opinion cannot change the nature of Caste. Though a Bishop or an Archbishop should say that Caste may be kept, we must not keep it because it is contrary to the Gospel of Christ'.[18] It is a great 'barrier to the propagation of the Gospel' for the Christian who retains caste and hopes to use it as an instrument for the furtherance of Christianity by doing so destroys his own credibility, 'dishonours Christianity, and its precepts, and confirms the Heathens in their idolatries.'[19] Not surprisingly Anderson's converts do not believe that secular education in itself is enough to destroy the sway of caste: a radical change of heart, conversion, is required.

Krishna Mohan Banerjea, who later became known as the propounder of a theology in which Vedic religion found its fulfilment in Christianity, published a prize essay on Hindu Caste in 1851.[20] A Kulin Brahman converted under the influence of Alexander Duff, Banerjea's essay is notable for the range of its citations from Sanskrit sacred writings and for its inside knowledge of caste. He is no more sympathetic to the caste system than the missionaries or his fellows from the sister institution in Madras whose opinions we have just considered. But his account of the system in its origins, development, and contemporary state is outstandingly scholarly. He demonstrates from a wide range of sources – various Upanishads, Puranas, the code of Manu, the commentaries of Sankaracharya, the Bhagavad Gita, the Brahmanas – that caste has always been a religious no less than a civil institution, and he argues that both in origin and development the system has served the selfish interests of the Brahmans.[21] His criticisms in many ways echo points which have become commonplaces of the missionary attack on caste: by denying that all men share a common origin, the Hindus make social divisions impregnable with the result that fellow-feeling for those of another caste is destroyed and arrogance is encouraged – 'The mind is inflated by the enjoyment of undeserved honours, which vanity and self-love attribute to real merit.'[22] By forcing people, often against their own natural inclinations and aptitudes, to follow their hereditary occupations mental growth is obstructed and the ultimate result is 'the intellectual prostration of the people.'[23]

But the nub of Banerjea's objection to the caste system is distinctively his own, and very much more secular than was common among the missionaries of the time: caste is the main cause for the decadence and humiliation of India. In a casteless society 'The austerity and spiritual pride of the priest may be rectified by the soldier's gallantry and the merchant's worldliness. The ferocity of the soldier may be softened by the self-denying devotion of the priest. The merchant's avarice may be corrected by the severe austerity and the generous gallantry of the other two classes. But the institution of caste deprives the state of these advantages by isolating the several professions from one another.'[24] From this has arisen 'the depression of the arts' as well as the circumscribing of intellectual activity, and 'the national character of the people cannot but suffer under such circumstances. The institution of caste, by forcing professions on men without regard to their qualifications and tastes, has a tendency to fill the country with bad priests, bad warriors, bad mechanics, etc. People cannot be expected to improve a science or an art in which

they feel no interest; nor are they likely to take an interest in those things, to which they are wedded by birth, not inclination.'[25] Consequently 'the national character soon degenerated. The sun of India's prosperity began to decline; and it soon set.'[26] Banerjea is already a deeply patriotic thinker. He objects to caste because it is 'the principal cause of India's humiliation', which 'put an end to unity and strength in the nation. A people, divided and sub-divided like the Hindus, can never make head against any power that deserves the name.'[27] It was caste more than anything else which made India so weak that she could not resist the Muslim invasions, and we may assume (although Banerjea does not say so) that caste also delivered India to the British. The possibility of national renaissance depends upon the abolition of caste, and the only sure and effective antidote to caste is Christianity: 'If India be destined in the counsels of providence to look up once more among the nations of the earth, it will only be by unlearning the institution of caste, and by adopting the religion of her present rulers with all its temporal and spiritual blessings.'[28]

A strong emphasis on a providential ordering of history was characteristic of the missionaries of the nineteenth century. They were prone to interpret the establishment and sustaining of British rule in India, the quelling of the Mutiny, and other political events as signs of divine guidance. Alexander Duff and John Wilson in particular recur constantly in their writings to the theme of providential ordering of history, and make particular play with the notion that India is to follow the same path of renaissance and reformation which had shaped modern Europe. The reader will have little difficulty in noticing the similarity of these views to some modern theories of development. But whereas the missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century hardly hint that British rule in India may not be other than the ultimate dispensation of providence for India, converts not infrequently saw reformation, renaissance, and British rule as contributing to the building up of a true nationalism with political independence as its proper fulfilment.[29]

Banerjea shares with another of Duff's converts, Lal Behari Day, the distinction of being the fathers of what one might call Indian-Christian nationalism. There is nothing strange in this, for Duff's explicit aim was to raise up men who would lead a Reformation and Renaissance in India. 'When the set time arrives', he wrote, 'the real Reformers of Hindustan, will be qualified Hindus. As in every other case of national awakening, the first impulse must come from abroad; its onward dynamic force must be of native growth.'[30] The

missionary task was to prepare for and stimulate the coming reformation, and in particular to 'rouse... some Indian Luther.'[31] Not altogether surprisingly, when 'Indian Luthers' began to appear they had minds of their own; but Duff was as unprepared for this as any of the missionaries. When Day claimed equality with the Scottish missionaries and a seat on mission council like them, Duff's reaction was totally negative. Nor was there missionary sympathy for his later proposal for a National Church of Bengal which would incorporate all Christian denominations.[32] Banerjea, Day, and others like them accepted in its entirety the missionary critique of caste; then, quite logically, they discerned that the principle which justified the rejection of caste had clear implications for the relations of missionaries and Indian Christians and for the competitive denominational barriers between Christians. The missionaries did not like the reformation they themselves had in large measures initiated, and did their best to snuff it out as soon as it challenged their own social and ecclesiastical prejudices. They found themselves playing the Erasmian role to the fiery young Luthers; only they were far more disastrously successful in nipping the Reformation in the bud than Erasmus had been.

An apparently similar movement in Madras — the National Church founded in 1885 by Dr. S. Pulney Andy, a medical man trained and converted in England — shared with the Calcutta movement resentment at missionary paternalism, and the demand for more autonomy in theology and church organization as well as rejection of sectarian differences imported from the West. However, the National Church was also notably cool towards the missionary attack on caste and to some extent became a refuge for Christians who believed that caste was compatible with the Gospel.[33] Some other indigenizing sects represent in part a reaffirmation of caste solidarity in face of missionary attacks on caste,[34] but also suggest the mounting strength of the resentment against the missionaries among Christians in many parts of India as the century drew to a close.

Nehemiah Goreh, a Konkani Brahmin convert who showed in his controversies with the Brahmo Samaj both considerable understanding of Hinduism and a somewhat forbiddingly orthodox understanding of Christianity, accepted the missionary line on caste without question: 'Christianity with caste would be no Christianity at all' he said.[35] Very different was the view of another convert who became a theologian of great power and originality, Brahmobandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907). His uncle was Kali Charan Banerjea, the founder of the Christo Samaj, and he himself

was a friend of Vivekananda. He was baptized as an Anglican and within a year rebaptized as a Roman Catholic, but he always showed reluctance to become identified fully with any particular denomination and viewed most of them as alien distraction from the real possibilities of being an Indian Christian, or a Hindu Christian as he preferred to call himself. His theology, with which we are not directly concerned here, saw the principle of catholicity and the kind of synthesis between philosophy and religion represented by Thomism as keys to the development of a distinctively Indian way of thinking about Christ. He was increasingly drawn into the reawakened nationalist movement and felt called to identify himself socially to the full with Hindu society. 'It is the foreign clothes of the Catholic Faith', he wrote, 'that have chiefly prevented our countrymen from perceiving its universal nature. Catholicism has donned the European garb in India. Our Hindu brethren cannot see the subtlety and sanctity of our divine religion because of its hard coating of Europeanism... When the Catholic Church in India will be dressed in Hindi garments then will our countrymen perceive that she elevates men to the Universal Kingdom of Truth by stooping down to adapt herself to his racial peculiarities.[36] Increasingly he came to feel that in all save religion he was a Hindu, and he underwent a purifying ceremony *(prayaschitta)* to signify his full re-entry into Hindu society after having mixed his Europeans.[37] 'In customs and manners, in observing caste and social distinctions, in eating and drinking, in our life and living, we are genuine Hindus'; he wrote, 'but in our faith we are neither Hindus nor European, nor American, nor Chinese, but all inclusive. Our faith fills the whole world and is not confined to any country or race; our faith is universal and consequently includes all truths.'[38]

Upadhyaya's defence of the caste system in his article 'Varna Ashram or the Aryan Social Divisions'[39] reads like a point-by-point rebuttal of Krishna Mohan Banerjea's essay of fifty years before, although it is explicitly directed against speech by Ranade at the Lahore Social Conference. 'India's past greatness can be traced more or less to the principle of conservation of vocations by means of hereditary differentiation', he wrote, and proceeded to contrast this idyllic social order with the crass materialism of western society based on competition, where 'grades are measured by the standard of gold.' Hindu society had indeed declined from its pristine purity and vigour, but this was largely the result of compromising with alien notions of social order. Yet the true principles for the future of Indian society were still to be found in *varnashramadharma.*

Accordingly, 'social reform should be carried out on national lines, according to the genius of the Hindu race', or otherwise self-respect will be lost and 'all reforms will tend to our denationalisation and disintegration.' It is not hard to find in Upadhyaya a strong foretaste of Gandhi's ideas on caste, although in many ways Upadhyaya was the less radical of the two.

By the turn of the century in the more nationalistic climate of opinion it was becoming obvious that the Christian attack on caste was not about to cause the collapse of Hindu society and that Christian communalism was withdrawing more Christians from a general concern for the good of society and involvement with the national movement, thus creating a real danger that the church would become an alien minority encapsulated within Hindu society and incapable of relating in any meaningful way with that society. Upadhyaya escaped from the ghetto and thereby opened a way which pitifully few of his fellow-Christians were to follow. If his position of *varna ashram* involved some compromising of the principle that in Christ there is no longer Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, but all are one, none the less he showed with great courage and clarity that the Christian ethic was relevant to the turmoils of the new India.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

1 *Inquiries made by the Bishop of Madras Regarding the Removal of Caste Prejudices and Practices in the Native Church of South India; together with the Replies of the Missionaries and Native Clergy sent thereto.* Madras, 1868.
2 Ibid., p. 3.
3 Ibid., p. 6.
4 Bishop Heber to the Rev. Christian David, 26-7-1824, printed in H. Bower, *An Essay on Hindu Caste,* Calcutta, 1851, pp. 96-7.
5 Ibid., pp. 97-101.
6 Bateman, J., *The Life of the Rt. Rev. Daniel Wilson, D.D.* London, 1860. pp. 461-473; cf. Daniel Wilson (ed.), *Bishop Wilson's Journal Letters.* London, 1863, pp. 36-55.
7 Ibid., p. 473.
8 See the Petition to the Board of Revenue, Madras, of 17 Feb. 1840 signed by 32 non-Brahmans of Salem, dated 17 Feb. 1840, for a strong statement that the Brahmans have perverted the caste system into being a support for their own pre-eminence. (In Bower, op.cit., pp. 91-95). The Tanjore missionaries agreed in reply to Heber's inquiries, that caste as a purely civil institution existed before the Brahmans came and they made it a sacred and immutable social order. It follows that 'heathens, who embrace Christianity, return back in point of caste, from error to original truth, they make caste again what it had been before, a civil distinction.' Cited in P. Percival, *The Land of the Veda.* London 1854, p. 491.
9 Bateman, op.cit., pp. 465, 468, 470-1.
10 J. Braidwood, *True Yokefellows in the Mission Field.* London 1862.
11 Accounts of the discussion were published in *The Native Herald* in 1845 and 1846, and reprinted in Joseph Roberts, *Caste in its Religious and Civil Character Opposed to Christianity.* London, 1847, pp. 63-131. Both Free Church of Scotland missionaries and their converts wrote extensively on caste in the issues of *The Native Herald* from 1842 onwards.
12 Biographical details are taken from Braidwood, op.cit.
13 Roberts, op.cit., p. 89 (Rajagapaul).
14 Ibid., p. 67.
15 Ibid., p. 87 (Rajagapaul).
16 Ibid., p. 106 (Appasawmy). On anti-Brahmanism, see pp. 122-3 (Ramanoojooloo).
17 Ibid., p. 85.
18 Ibid., p. 117.
19 Ibid., p. 72.
20 The essay is published in the *Calcutta Review,* Vol. XV (1851) pp. 36-75. For accounts and discussions of Banerjea's life and thought see Eric

Sharpe, *Not to Destroy but to Fulfil.* Uppsala, 1965, pp. 91-3; Kaj Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity.* Bangalore, CISRS, 1969, pp. 13-16; M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance.* Madras, 1970, pp. 51, 327; Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology.* Madras, 1969, pp. 57-65; M. A. Laird, *Missionaries and Education in Bengal, 1793-1837.*Oxford, 1972, pp. 138-228, 230-1, 241-2; David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance.* Berkeley, 1969, pp. 261-2.

21 In his essay of 1851 Banerjea makes a clear distinction between caste as a contemporary reality and the very different social orders sanctioned by Manu and to be found in the oldest Vedic writings. He is, however, cautious about making categorical statements about what is, or is not, contained in the Vedas for, 'It may be doubted whether a copy of the entire Vedas is procurable in any part of Hindustan.' He refers to the Upanishads as part of the Vedas. By 1875 he can state categorically that caste did not exist in the Vedic age *(The Arian Witness.* Calcutta, 1875, p. 174); Max Müller's work on the Rig Veda had been completed in 1873.

22 Banerjea, 'Caste', 67.

23 Ibid., p. 66.

24 Ibid., pp. 68-69.

25 Ibid., p. 69.

26 Ibid., p. 70.

27 Ibid., p. 70.

28 Ibid., p. 70.

29 Compare, for example, the essay of Narayan Sheshadri on 'The Moral Darkness of India' with John Wilson's 'The Dawn of Gospel Light in India not to be Despised' in Narayan Sheshadri and John Wilson, *The Darkness and the Dawn in India: Two Missionary Discourses.* Edinburgh, 1853. Sheshadri sees the British and missionary impact on India, and especially the attack on caste, as making possible for the first time the development of patriotism (pp. 33-34); Wilson goes no further than seeing British rule as providential in an unspecific way (p.53).

30 Alexander Duff, *India and India Missions.* 2nd edn., Edinburgh, 1840, p. 355.

31 Ibid., p. 377.

32 On Lal Behari Day, see G. Macpherson, *Lal Behari Day, Convert, Pastor, Professor.* Edinburgh, 1900; M. M. Thomas, op.cit., 39-55; M. A. Laird, op.cit., 210-19, 258; Baago op.cit., pp. 2-4.

33 On Pulney Andy and the National Church see Dr. S. Pulney Andy, (ed.), *Collection of Papers Connected with the Movement of the National Church in India (Madras).* Madras, 1893 (Microfilm in the U.T.C. Archives, Bangalore) Esp. pp. 10, 27, 111; Also Baago op. cit., pp. 7-11, and Bengt Sundkler, *Church of South India: The Movement Towards Union, 1900-1947.* London, 1954 pp. 26-27, and the references cited there, to which may be added the correspondence about its formation in *Madras Standard* 29 Nov. 1886, p.2, and his obituary in

Madras Mail 23 Sept. 1909, p.5. (I am indebted for these last two references to Dr. Robin Jeffrey).

34 For example, the Hindu Church of Lord Jesus, led by one Sathampillai in Tinnevelly. See Robert L. Hardgrave, Jnr., *The Nadars of Tamilnad.* Berkeley, 1969, pp. 71-78, and M. Thomas Thangaraj, 'The History and Teachings of the Hindu Christian Community Commonly called Nattu Sabai in Tirunelveli'. *Indian Church History Review,* Vol. V/I, 1971, pp. 43-68.

35 C. E. Gardner, *Life of Father Goreh.* London, 1900, p.7; in addition see Boyd, op.cit., pp. 40 ff.; M. M. Thomas, op.cit., pp. 39 ff., 47-50, 53-55.

36 Cited in Boyd, op.cit., p. 83.

37 On Upadhyaya see: Baago, op.cit., 26-49, 118-150; Boyd, op.cit., pp. 58-85; Thomas, op.cit., 103-114, 263-4; de Bary (ed.), *Sources of Indian Tradition.* Vol. II, New York, 1958, pp. 182-186.

38 Cited in de Bary, op.cit., p. 183.

39 *The Twentieth Century,* I/1, 8-11.

CHAPTER VII

LIBERAL MISSIONARY ATTITUDES TO CASTE

From the late nineteenth century missionary thinking became increasingly influenced in the direction of a more tolerant and understanding attitude towards Indian culture in general by the interpretations of Hinduism propounded by influential indologists such as Max Müller and Sir Monier Monier-Williams and by the steadily increasing impact of liberal theology in its various schools. These two influences taken together undermined many of the old theological presuppositions on which most Protestant missionary work had been based; and the indologists in particular helped in the construction of new and positive views of the proper relation of Christianity and Indian social structure.

Many indologists and students of the new science of religion were recognised as allies of the missionaries. Some missionaries had found that in controversy and discussion with Hindus they were seriously handicapped by the unavailability of many of the authoritative texts to which learned Hindus appealed, and aware of a dangerous ignorance on their part of Hinduism and Hindu society. They called out for translations of the Hindu sacred texts, and for scholarly and objective information about Hindu religion. A book such as Ward's *Account of the Writings, Religion and Manners of the Hindoos* (1811) had been used as an authoritative guide until its flagrant factual inaccuracies and distorting prejudices had become intolerable. The missionaries then turned for help to the new breed of scholars, particularly to those of them who were themselves professing Christians. And they were not disappointed. Not only did the indologists produce a stream of translations of sacred texts and philosophical commentaries, which were in some cases of considerable polemical use to the missionaries, but they armed them with more reliable and objective handbooks on Hinduism than any which had been available before. Max Müller, Monier-Williams, and some other leading scholars were publicly committed to the cause of missions, but they had their own understanding of the purpose and strategy of missions and of the relationship between Christianity and other religions which quickly and deeply influenced missionary thinking, backed up as it was by such formidable scholarship and such moving expressions of support for the missionary enterprise.

Max Müller explicitly viewed the new studies of religion as aids to Christian apologetic, but an apologetic of a new sort. Backed by

citations from the Fathers of the Church, he denied what had been a fundamental postulate of much previous theology of missions – the assertion of a radical discontinuity between other faiths and Christianity, in which nothing but the good was discerned in Christianity and other religions were viewed as regions of unmitigated darkness and depravity. Instead Müller affirmed that 'the Science of Religion will for the first time assign to Christianity its right place among the religions of the world; it will show for the first time fully what was meant by the fulness of time; it will restore to the whole history of the world, in its unconscious progress towards Christianity, its true and sacred character.'[1] Instead of unqualified rejection of all other faiths, missionaries should, Müller believed, realise that 'every religion, even the most imperfect and degraded, has something that ought to be sacred to us, for there is in all religions a secret yearning after the true, though unknown, God'.[2] Accordingly, the missionaries 'instead of looking only for points of difference, will look out more anxiously for any common ground, any spark of the true light that may still be revived, any altar that may be dedicated afresh to the true God.'[3] Such counsel coming from an infidel or an antagonist to missions would have been rejected out of hand; but coming from one who had done so much to put his scholarship at the service of the missionaries while himself affirming in no uncertain terms the finality of Christianity, it could not but be influential.

Müller made a very clear distinction between popular Hinduism on the one hand and classical philosophic Hinduism on the other. When a distinguished theologically conservative missionary asked him to write his own assessment of contemporary Hinduism, Müller replied: 'I should like very much to follow your advice and write a paper for the Hindus to tell them what I think of their religion, their philosophy and their idolatry, but it is a difficult task. They possess much that is true, good and right in their early religion, much that is most profound in their Vedanta philosophy. But everything is mixed up with so much rubbish that one hardly knows what language to use without doing mischief. I have been often blamed for dwelling on the good side of their religion and philosophy only, but the other side is so childish that it does not seem to deserve any notice.'[4] This 'good side' was particularly evident, he believed in certain reform movements which he interpreted as being to a great extent positive responses to Christian teaching. Writing in the 1890s he confessed that the convergence with Christianity which he had seen in those movements had not in fact gone very far: 'I feel much disappointed

that Ram Mohan Roy's and Keshub Chunder Sen's work should apparently lose itself on the road. I hoped Mozumdar would have carried it on, but his influence seems very small.'[5] But men such as these had pointed to the correct path, and missionaries should not frustrate the convergence by preaching a narrow version of the Gospel and demanding that converts break their links with their tradition. 'My own feeling', he wrote to Murdoch, 'is that in becoming Christians both Brahmans and Buddhists might retain much that is good in their ancient traditions, but to work this out in detail is too hard a task for me. It ought to come from the people themselves, as, for instance, from Keshub Chunder Sen, before his health, physical and mental, failed. The entrance to Christianity ought to be made as wide as possible. At the same time it ought to be made an honour, and not to be forced on unwilling souls. At all events Missionaries must learn patience. They can do most by becoming the friends of the leaders of Hindu thought. Keshub Chunder Sen was a Christian in all but outward form, and so is Mozumdar. That is something, nay a great deal – but history cannot be forced though it may be helped.'[6]

On caste Müller never retreated from the stand he had taken in 1858.[7] The rigid Protestant opposition to caste, he believed, had made the entrance to Christianity unjustifiably narrow, and missionaries on the whole had become incapable of seeing any good at all in the caste system. Their converts, on the other hand, often found it hard to see the connection between the Gospel and the missionaries' obsessive insistence on a root-and-branch renunciation of caste.

Max Müller's argument on caste was the least welcome part of his teaching to most Protestant missionaries. He had roundly denied the missionaries' belief that caste was an integral part of the Hindu system, and had backed up his argument with abundant good authorities. He regarded the desacralizing of caste as both possible and desirable, and considered that this would leave behind a caste system which was in many ways an admirable social order. He quite explicitly attacked the Protestant consensus that caste was an evil and idolatrous thing inseparable from Hindu religion, and aligned himself with the policies which had been followed by Schwartz and the older Lutheran missionaries. One hears clear undertones of Lutheran theology and of German romantic conservatism; Müller distinguished two kingdoms, and finds it hard to see the religious realm as having a significant impact on secular life; he has a singular lack of sympathy for any kind of egalitarianism or individualism; he

regards cultures and nations as organic spiritual realities; but he leaves some crumbs of comfort to the missionaries.

For Müller the Christian mission is infinitely more than the amassing of individual converts, it is the penetration at depth of a culture and a religion which will result in some new synthesis, at the same time distinctly Christian and distinctly Indian, and such penetration can indeed be achieved by missionaries of perceptive sympathy. 'One cannot measure the success of a missionary by the number of converts he had made', Müller wrote to Dr. Norman Macleod, Convener of the Church of Scotland's India Mission, 'and it does not seem to me likely that Christianity will, for some time to come, spread in India chiefly by means of direct conversions. Its influence, however, is felt everywhere, and even the formation of new religious societies apparently hostile to Christianity, like the Brahma Samaj, is due indirectly to the preaching and teaching of Christian missionaries. From what I know of the Hindoos they seem to me riper for Christianity than any nation that ever accepted the Gospel. It does not follow that the Christianity of India will be the Christianity of England; but that the new religion of India will embrace all the essential elements of Christianity I have no doubt, and that is surely something worth fighting for.'[8] Such a vision of the Christian mission had penetrated deep by the end of the nineteenth century, and its consequences were a new mood of caution in dealing with the caste problem, a new openness to the possibility of caste having some salutory features, and a more self-critical approach on the part of missionaries.

Certain developments in nineteenth-century theology influenced missionary though very profoundly, although the impact in India of new theological trends was sometimes rather delayed. The assumption that those who had never heard the gospel were eternally damned could not easily survive alongside the new universalism. In Scotland, McLeod Campbell and Erskine of Linlathen rejected 'double predestination' and the notion of limited atonement – the Calvinist assumption that a few were predestined to salvation and many to damnation, and that Christ died only for the elect. In England, George MacDonald was ejected from his church in Arundel in 1852, partly because the congregation deemed heretical his teaching that there was a hope of salvation for the heathen who had never heard the Gospel. Inevitably this led to a reconsideration of the motive for missions. If the evangelist were not simply concerned with saving individuals from the *massa perditionis*, with plucking brands from the burning, the way was open to a far broader conception of

mission which did not operate with such simplistic and clear-cut distinctions between truth and falsity, light and darkness, and salvation and reprobation, but could address itself to man in his total cultural and religious situation in a far more open way than heretofore. Indology and theology were converging, and pointing towards the same understanding of mission. But of course all this was not entirely new: Alexander Duff, Calvinist as he was, had been well aware of God working out his purposes in history and dealing with peoples and cultures, not only with individuals.

Romanticism, mediated to the Anglo-Saxon world particularly through Coleridge and Carlyle, brought with it a new reverence for, and interest in, systems of belief and of society which have evolved slowly over centuries, and a certain unwillingness to interfere harshly or needlessly. F. D. Maurice, under Coleridge's influence, taught that western Christians had much to learn from other faiths, and that Christianity must not be confined in its western expression, so that the gospel might convey 'the assurance that there is One who has taken the nature, not of Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards, but of Man; who has entered into man's misery and death; has borne the sins of man; has encountered all his enemies and vanquished them.'[9] And this process, Maurice was sure, would reveal much that is true and much that points to Christ in other faiths. Even the caste system demonstrated in distorted form, he believed, fundamental spiritual and Christian truths: 'that there is in man that which is meant to converse with an Unseen Spiritual Being, that this is the vocation of the highest wisest men, of him who is properly *the* man, who is alone able to guide and rule his fellows', and the notion of a second birth.[10]

Ritschlian theology from Germany emphasized very strongly the ethical element in Christianity and joined with American Social Gospel thought in depicting Christianity as essentially concerned with the following of the historical Jesus and building of the Kingdom of God. The centrality of the theme of the Kingdom protected the new theology against excesses of individualism, although there was often a great depreciation of the place of the church and of dogma. Closely interwoven ideas of progress and evolution became influential and were linked with Hegelian ideas, particularly the belief that religions could be arranged in a hierarchy, each transcending its predecessor, and Christianity being the ultimate religion which supersedes all other religions, not simply by displacing them, but by fulfilling them and gathering into itself their positive values. Applied to caste, this meant that missionaries could now recognize its usefulness, particularly in the past, and rather

than destroying it encourage and enable it to grow and evolve into a new, and Christian, social order.[11]

The influence of these theological tendencies is clear, a couple of decades before it was expressed widely among missionaries in India, in the thought of Norman Macleod, the church leader and friend of Max Müller and McLeod Campbell, who became Convener of the Church of Scotland's India Mission in 1864. Statements he made in the 1870s have a most prophetic ring and anticipate much that was taught after the turn of the century by thinkers such as Farquhar, Lucas, and C. F. Andrews. Macleod found it impossible 'to believe that God should create by His power millions of responsible beings, who are doomed to agonies for ever for not believing or not being what, from circumstances over which they had no control, they could not believe or be.'[12] He rejected the export to India of European denominational differences, and looked for the creation of a truly Indian church, 'an independent and all-inclusive native Indian Church ... Such a Church might, as taught by experience, mould its outward forms of government and worship according to its inner wants and outward circumstances, guided by history and by the teaching and spirit of Christianity.'[13] The members of such a church 'might lay better hold on other aspects of divine truth' from those brought from the west, and 'might mould a theology for themselves, not less Christian, but which would be Indian, and not English or Scotch.'[14] While recognizing the great evils involved in the present form of the caste system, Macleod applauded 'its recognition of two great principles in social life, which, though in this case perverted, are adjusted by the Christian creed and a true Christian Church; the first, that our place in the world is assigned to us by Divine sovereignty; and the second, that the co-operation and sympathy of a brotherhood are essential to our usefulness and happiness in the world.'[15] Furthermore he saw real possibilities of the caste system serving the advancement of missions; 'Even this tremendous system of caste is not wholly antagonistic to the efforts of the Christian Church. Its very strength may at last prove its weakness. If on the side of wrong it "moveth all together if it move at all", it may do so on the side of right. Let the wall be so far sapped that it must fall, it will do so, not by crumbling down in minute fragments, or even in separate masses, but as a whole. If the great army mutinies against Brahmanism, it will desert, not in units, but *en masse*.'[16] As every Hindu and the whole Hindu system find their fulfilment in Christianity, so caste will be fulfilled in Christian brotherhood. And as brotherhood transcends the fragmenting and weakening effects of

caste, India will become an independent nation. 'Our hopes of an Indian nation' he said, 'are bound up with our hopes of an Indian Church; and it is a high privilege for us to be able to help on this consummation. The West gives back to the East the riches it has from the East received, to be returned again, I doubt not, with interest to ourselves.'[17] These words, spoken in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1872, anticipated with uncanny precision the realignment of missionary thought which was to take place over the succeeding sixty years.

Ideas very similar to those of Macleod and shaped by the same liberalizing influences were being expressed among missionaries such as T. E. Slater by the 1880s.[18] But it also seemed that certain interpretations of the idea of progress could provide a justification for the continuation of a total and uncomprehending repudiation of caste, and for an attitude of cultural and religious arrogance. Caste, so this argument ran, is primitive and all progressive men must wish to consign it to the scrap-heap of history. Some, like the Bishop of Madras, went further and saw the continuation of 'western control' in the church as essential if caste influences were not to creep back. Only the missionary, apparently, was immune to the contagion of caste, so only he could be the standard-bearer of progress, civilization and Christianity.[19] But such views were deviations, if influential ones, from the mainstream of liberal thought, which by the first decade of the twentieth century was applying itself to a reconsideration of caste in the writings of missionaries such as J. D. Maynard and Bernard Lucas.

Maynard was a missionary of the Society of Friends, and, as one would expect, the church played a less significant role in his thought than in that of many other missionaries. Maynard reopened the caste question in an article in 1906,[20] in which he was concerned primarily with an assessment of the accepted strategy for coping with caste. He starts by affirming that caste is indeed a great evil, both in Hindu society and when it infiltrates the church; but the problem of how to deal with it is complex because it involves the question of 'the whole relation of the Church to a highly organized civilization.' Maynard cannot see the missionary task in Duff's terms, as planting a time-bomb in the foundations of this civilization; indeed he admires a great deal in Hindu culture and even significant features of its social system: 'Undoubtedly we have in caste a very marvellous, and in many ways successful, form of social organization, which has maintained peace, industry and contentment among many millions of people. The fact that it has spread over the whole of India, that it

still gathers in tribes that have not yet come within its compass, and that the people as a whole are so averse to any interference with it, shows that it does meet real needs and serves purposes that perhaps could not be so well served in any other way. If we are to form a true opinion of the caste system in its relation to Christian Missions, we must take into consideration the fact that it has been the social organization of many millions of people over a vast area for more than two thousand years.' Such concern with the function of caste within Indian society and such respect for it on account of its antiquity, its persistence, and its wide diffusion were relatively new notes in Protestant missionary thinking. 'An effective political force that works steadily for millenniums cannot be wholly evil', he continues, in particular when it acts as a civilizing force and shares with Christianity the belief that 'no man liveth to himself.' Yet, having made such concessions, Maynard still concludes that caste is incompatible with Christianity, not, he emphasizes, because it obstructs successful proselytizing, but because, 'Caste is rigid; Christianity is responsive and adaptable. Caste is a system: Christianity is life. Caste is of the law; Christianity is of faith ... Caste is of the dead past; Christianity of the eternal future. Caste rests on a conception of the ultimate reality of the distinctions between men, accepts and fixes these, and gives no hope of a change. Christianity rests on a conception of the equal value of all men before God, and the temporary character of all earthly distinctions. The two are incompatible'.

The problem which really concerns Maynard is not the evaluation of the caste system but the development of a strategy to govern the relationship between Christianity and caste. Whatever may be the larger purposes of evangelization – and, as we shall see when we consider Bernard Lucas, there were missionaries who saw their task as vastly different from, and broader than, the mere making of individual converts – in practice almost everyone saw both the aim and the result of missionary work as merely 'bringing people into the existing Church organization', which often appeared and operated very much as a caste. Consequently, Christians had largely given up any real confrontation with the caste spirit in favour of a process which seemed little more than encouraging a few individuals to change their caste. The nature and vocation of the church had been subtly but significantly modified as a consequence of its largely falling victim, like earlier religious protests against caste, to 're-absorption into the system'. Maynard believes that within the Indian context becoming a Christian need not involve becoming part of an

organized church which operates in such a caste-like way; indeed the most effective way of countering the caste-spirit would be to have Christians express Christian notions of brotherhood while remaining within their caste. This, he believes would be a far more effective road to the transformation of Indian society than constantly reiterated denunciations of the caste system. But the presupposition of this policy is a transformation of the church, which would give up its inherited structures and its caste-like organization in order to become 'the fresh and living fellowship of those of every race and caste who love Christ and in His spirit serve their fellow men.'

Maynard's vision is in many ways attractive and challenging, but it has its problems, which he never really faces. He seems to want to go further than the old Lutherans in the South (although some of his language is reminiscent of theirs); further even than de Nobili; for unlike them his conception of the church is thoroughly quakerish. But for all that, he is a most discerning observer, for he realises more acutely than most of his colleagues how much the church had already become a kind of caste, and how effectively this blunted the Christian impact on Indian society.

Bernard Lucas (1860-1920) was a missionary of the London Missionary Society who wrote prolifically, and was a representative of a certain strand of liberal thought, deeply suspicious of the individualism on which so much earlier missionary thought had been based, giving little place to an organized historical church, and emphasizing very strongly the universal Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. As a theologian Lucas is largely derivative and frequently woolly, but his writings are significant as expressions of an increasingly widespread intellectual mood and as one of the earliest extended efforts to work out the implications of this new mood for missionary strategy in India.[21]

Lucas makes a clear distinction between what he calls 'proselytism' and 'evangelism'. The former is the making of individual converts who at conversion are abstracted from their social and cultural context; the latter is the sympathetic penetration of a culture and society with the spirit of Christ. Proselytism taken by itself is a destructive process which is incapable in India of achieving a great deal, but distorts the Gospel and obstructs the true influence of Christianity in renewing and fulfilling cultures, societies, and religions. The historical Jesus himself was antagonistic to proselytizing – Lucas is not slow to cite Matthew 23.15! – and showed little concern for church organization and theological formulations: 'As far as we can judge, from the actual practice of

Christ Himself, such organization occupies an entirely secondary place, and the chief place is given to a ministry to the spiritual life, apart altogether from any demand of a theological or ecclesiastical kind.'[22] Lucas inquires 'what God has been doing through the ages for the salvation of the world outside the sphere of Jewish and Christian influences'[23], and answers that an educative process has been going on through varying forms of religion, culture and society. Missionaries must no longer ignore the education which God has been giving to the nations. This was a *preparatio evangelica* rather different from that taught by Duff, because it had been under way for many centuries before missionaries came to India, and it had operated across a wide front which includes Hindu religion and social forms.

Lucas contrasts the old and the new understandings of mission in a vivid illustration: The old idea that India was like a wrecked ship, and the missionaries' role that of lifeboatmen who save those survivors who come within their reach must be replaced by the notion of India as a ship which is aground, but can be brought safely to harbour by judicious assistance. The missionary may certainly claim with justice that his 'lifeboat' has already rescued multitudes of the outcaste population, who have been, as it were, swept overboard, and to whose fate the other passengers have shown themselves callously indifferent. But what has then become of them? They have been 'landed ... on sandbanks and desert islands, and supplied ... with as much of our stores as we could give, but the question of their future is one of grave anxiety.' This rescue has been 'a noble work ... *but it is not the salvation of India.*' If the people as a whole are to be saved, the ship itself must be brought into port, for '*the people will not leave the ship*'. Hence 'the true task which confronts us is that of getting her floated, her damages repaired, her disorganized crew and distracted passengers organized and encouraged.'[24] For Lucas, the church as it already exists in India is composed of the castaways who have been swept overboard and then landed by the lifeboat on 'sandbanks' which can be no more than temporary refuges. This rescue operation is but a small part of the true task of the church of India.

Lucas does have a vision of the church as she should be, but the vision is tantalizing and fragmentary: 'It is a body composed of many members differing from each other as pronouncedly in organization and function as the limbs of the human body, and yet united through sharing a common life. The one and only distinctive mark which it bears is the mark of the Christ-spirit. It can admit all creeds provided

the creeds do not dominate the Christ-spirit, but are subject to it; it will accept all colours provided each colour is pervaded by the Christ-spirit and recognizes the brotherhood of the Christ. The real Church, therefore, is nothing less than the whole human family conscious of their relation to one another and to God, through the possession of the spirit of life in Jesus Christ. India has her place in this universal Church of the Christ, and into it she can bring the riches of her own past and the wealth of her own religious life and thought. The Christ came into the world not to destroy any religion but, to fulfil all, not to impoverish any religious life, but, to give fuller and more abounding life to all.'[25] We find here the fulfilment theory in a quite developed form set in a thoroughly universalist context, together with an embryonic 'theology of the nations' quite strikingly similar to that of the Lutheran missionaries half a century before. But we are left in darkness as to how the church should fulfill her distinctive vocation and whether she should retain any separate identity and structure at all. But the most important questions to pose to Lucas's view of the church concern the relation of the 'Christ-spirit' to existing social realities. Are all forms of society equally capable of expressing the spirit of brotherhood? To be specific, how can caste, without being so modified that it becomes something altogether different, be pervaded by the spirit of Christ?

Earlier Protestant missionaries had, for the most part, believed that the principles of caste were irreconcilably antagonistic to Christian values; Lucas differs from them, and spells out his understanding of the proper Christian attitude to caste in an article published in 1912.[26] A great deal of this article echoes things said earlier by J. D. Maynard. Like Maynard, Lucas believes that there is an antagonism between Christianity – he prefers to speak of the spirit of Christ – and 'the spirit which caste fosters', an antagonism so deep that it 'can only be dissolved by the death of one or the other.' But one must notice that Lucas parallels his distinction between church or Christianity and the Christ-spirit with a firm distinction between caste as a social order and the caste-spirit. The conflict is between two 'spirits' rather than two social orders. Lucas vigorously attacks other missionaries for denouncing the caste system when they should have been concerned with overcoming the caste-spirit and for negative onslaughts on caste taking the place of positive inculcation of brotherhood. Caste, he says, should be transcended, as it is among Sadhus and Sanyasis, rather than broken. One cannot but suspect that Lucas regards the whole question of the ordering of society as rather inconsequential, and has a vision of Christianity which is

ethical indeed, but seriously lacking in social realism. He has some important insights, however: he notices that although educated Indian opinion is increasingly sure that the caste system requires to be reformed, there are many who see those who break away from caste as severing themselves from their national heritage and acting in unpatriotic fashion. He is also aware of the extent to which caste is still influential among Christians, and also that there are many who worship Christ and show every evidence of possessing the Christ-spirit, who are nevertheless unbaptized and whose caste is unbroken. He regards the missionary antagonism to caste as not only misplaced – they should have been concerned only with the caste-spirit – but largely superfluous, since 'the caste-spirit is doomed, for it cannot survive in the larger life and freer atmosphere of the twentieth century. As a social institution caste will undergo greater and greater modification, its restrictions will decline in power, and though the name will remain the thing will be essentially different. The Christian propagandist must recognize these signs of the time and modify his attitude accordingly. In our preaching, the denunciation of caste, like the denunciation of Hinduism, must be replaced by the fullest proclamation of brotherhood.'

When we pass from Lucas to the consideration of his contemporary and fellow-Congregationalist, J. N. Farquhar (1861-1929), we find some shared presuppositions and emphases. Both give a central position to the typically liberal understanding of Christianity as basically concerned with the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man; both have a highly ethical and undogmatic understanding of their faith; for both the church is somewhat problematical, although far less so for Farquhar than for Lucas – Farquhar can see a place for the church as a kind of small-scale demonstration of the true nature of the divine society as well as the custodian of the Christian insights into the nature of God, man and society; they share an understanding of Christianity as the fulfilment of all human aspirations, including his religious hopes. But to Farquhar belongs the distinction of having produced the definitive systematic exposition of the fulfilment theory in his book *The Crown of Hinduism*. Farquhar goes far beyond Lucas and diverges from him at a variety of critical points, indeed the two men do not share much more than a common attempt at sympathetic understanding of Hinduism and the conviction that the concept of fulfilment provides the clue to understanding the true relationship between Christianity and Hinduism.[27]

Unlike Lucas, Farquhar believed that Christianity fulfilled Hinduism by replacing it: 'It is my conviction', he wrote, 'that, the Kingdom of God having come to India, Hinduism must pass away, so it is the duty of the Hindu to give up Hinduism so that Christianity may take its place, and may thereby fulfil all that is in it of good.'[28] Hinduism was in a state of decay, urgently calling for replacement by something better and more vigorous. Farquhar also used the concept of fulfilment in two other senses, without contradicting this primary one. The true and the good elements in Hinduism are fulfilled by reappearing in a 'higher form' in Christianity. And, finally, Christ is the true goal of the 'quests' of Hinduism.[29]

The notion of fulfilment is applied to the caste system in a chapter of *The Crown of Hinduism* entitled 'The Divine Social Order'. For many centuries the caste system had indeed been an admirable form of social order. Farquhar gives an interesting twist to the argument much used in the second half of the nineteenth century by Christian apologists to the effect that since caste did not exist in the Vedic age it was a later, and malignant, growth lacking in divine sanction. Now, under the influence of evolutionary thought, he can affirm that 'the caste system was a great advance on the simple social arrangements the Aryans had when they entered India ... It was the best possible solution of the problem open to them.'[30] It solved in an acceptable fashion the problem of the relationship of the invaders to the indigenous people; it preserved for century after century the vitality of Hindu culture; it performed the functions of the medieval European craft guild and the more modern poor law; and it still has a strong hold on the minds of most Hindus. Its capacity to withstand opposition had been remarkable, demonstrating a great elasticity and adaptability.[31] Above all, 'to the Hindu, caste is a divine institution which he is bound to maintain and revere.'[32]

In recent times, Farquhar continues, there has been an unprecedented transformation of Hindu opinion: 'thinking Hindus no longer hold that which is the foundation of the system, the doctrine that each man's caste is an infallible index of the stage of spiritual progress his soul has reached in its transmigrational journey.'[33] The fact that 'the religious basis of caste has faded out of the minds of educated Hindus'[34] bears pondering upon: Farquhar is convinced that no society can survive without a religious foundation, but the basic religious notions which shape and provide sanctions for the caste system are no longer credible for educated men. Few Hindus are left who are willing to defend caste as the one divine social order, and most who now declare that it is 'a purely social and non-religious

system' admit thereby that it is changeable and requires reform. For Farquhar it is axiomatic that the search for a lasting and healthy social order in India emphasizing equality, justice and freedom is also a spiritual quest.[35] This quest finds its social goal in Christianity: 'it is a very remarkable fact that these three social principles spring directly from the central doctrine of Christianity; so that, the more seriously Christianity is held, the more fully must society incarnate these ideals.'[36] Furthermore, Christianity will preserve and enhance the positive side of caste: in particular by showing that all men 'are Brahmans and more' with high duties and great privileges as children of God; in infusing a new sacramental note into the new social structure; and in preserving solidarity and purity.

Farquhar's argument is impressive, although he may fairly be criticized for an inadequate understanding of the process of secularisation, for rather exaggerated claims for the effects of Christian influence in India, and for failing to recognize the extent of the resilience of Hinduism and of the caste system. But he spoke to a particular situation in the first two decades of the present century, and his assessment of that situation was shrewd. Farquhar was overtaken by events, and in the 1930s it was Farquhar's friend, C. F. Andrews (1871-1940) who carried out the more challengingly relevant Christian analysis of Indian society.

Andrews came to India in 1904 as a high church Anglican, to work as an educational missionary in St. Stephen's College, Delhi. His love of India, his sympathetic understanding, and his remarkable gift for friendships which broke down barriers of race, caste, class and creed marked him out as an exceptional man. His lasting friendship with S. K. Rudra, the first Indian principal of the College, helped him to understand Indian society from the inside.[37] Andrew's theology is unsystematic and changes substantially in the course of his life, but his thought on social issues is very much more fully developed, and evolves in a coherent and interesting fashion under the influences of Gandhi and of Andrew's own experiences, particularly his personal involvement with the destiny of the Indian communities in South Africa and Fiji – in both cases the descendants of indentured labourers who were grossly discriminated against in their new homes. Like his mentors, F. D. Maurice and Westcott, he believes that faith must lead to a social expression.

From the beginning Andrews understood caste discrimination and racial discrimination as essentially the same thing; against both his face was set implacably. With such intolerable evils no compromise was thinkable. In his early years in India Andrews could see nothing

positive at all in the caste system, and he lent his unquestioning support to the missionary onslaught on caste. Caste seems to be totally beyond reform and the Christian church 'in attempting again and again to compromise with caste' has turned away from Christ.[38] Caste practices within the Church are without excuse for 'the Church can only succeed if she refuses to harbour within her own fold those very racial and caste evils from which India is longing to be set free.'[39] Only if the battles against racialism and caste were successful would a truly strong and united Indian nation be possible; and in these battles the church had a vital interest and involvement: 'Rabindranath Tagore', he writes, 'has given us in his own words what India requires of us. "Do we not need", he cries, "an overwhelming influx of higher social ideals? Must we not have that greater vision of humanity which will impel us to shake off the fetters that shackle our individual life? ..." If ever there was a claim upon the Church of Christ to come forward in the name of the Lord, it is to be found in words like these. Has she not to offer that "influx of higher social ideals", that "greater vision of humanity"? ... No! She cannot succeed so long as she allows within her fold those very racial and caste evils, from which India is struggling to be free ... The final victory of the Christian faith in India depends upon the spiritual power manifested in bringing about the union of the English and the Indian, as Christians; the union of the Hindu and the Mussalman, as Christians; then and only then will the heart of India respond fully to the Christian message and a new Indian nation rise, enabled and strengthened to fulfill her great destiny in the world.'[40] Andrews had no illusions as to the continuing strength of caste and of racialism, but the battle against them was at the same time supremely Christian and the one sure way of building up a vital Indian church and a free and vigorous Indian nation.[41] He echoes quite precisely S. K. Rudra's view that only through evangelism 'to India would come at last in Christ that centre of unity which it so sorely needs. India's children would gain in Christ the full fruition of their new found national consciousness. A great Indian Church would become possible, and therefore a great Indian Nation.'[42] The early Andrews rejects the gradualism of Lucas and goes beyond Farquhar in demanding the total displacement of every manifestation of caste. He also allots a far clearer and more central role to the church in his vision of the renewal of India than did either Lucas or Farquhar.

Andrews' thought began to change very dramatically when in 1913 he left St. Stephen's and entered public life, going at Gokhale's behest to help the Indians in South Africa, and there encountering

Gandhi. Already in his earlier period he had been uneasy about the imposition on the Indian church of western doctrinal formulations and the scandal of the existence of competitive denominations. Now he became increasingly uneasy about the actual condition and stance of the churches in India and doubtful whether they were indeed capable of fulfilling the role he had earlier expectantly allocated to them. He ceased to operate as a priest of the Church of England and, although he never cut himself off from the church and not even his bitterest critics suggested that he had lost his faith, he began to take a very much more positive attitude both towards Hinduism and secular or inter-religious movements for social reform. He could see very clearly the work of Christ in movements and individuals many of which did not bear the label 'christian'. The churches had seriously compromised themselves by tolerating so much racialism and caste feeling and by erecting impregnable barriers around themselves.

Andrews' close friendship with Mahatma Gandhi influenced him very deeply. Yet while he applauded and shared in Gandhi's attack on untouchability he did not accept Gandhi's defence of *varnashramadharma* – the notion that caste could be shorn of its evils, particularly untouchability and disparity of esteem, and would then be shown to be a moral and appropriate social order for India.[43] Andrews was now perhaps not quite as sure as once he had been that caste was an unalloyed evil doomed to total destruction, but he still could not affirm it as a useful or just form of social order: 'Today in India the whole caste system is passing through the fire of the furnace, which will test it and purge it seven times over. It may be that it will be unable to stand the test. Some of India's greatest religious leaders and thinkers, such as Rabindranath Tagore, have almost given up hope of reformation from within now being possible. Yet he would be the first to demand that the useful purposes of racial adjustment which caste once fulfilled – however crudely – should not be undone. Other means should be adopted for bringing the different communities in India together on a far wider basis than the present stratification of caste.'[44] Although Andrews felt that the whole future of Christianity in India depended on the ability of Christians to welcome in a constructive and involved fashion the reform movements within Hinduism and identify themselves with the national movement, although he was convinced that 'the West must not try to pull the mote out of India's eye while the beam remains in its own eye,'[45] he could not accept the full Gandhian line on caste. Fellowship, unity, the brotherhood of man could never be adequately expressed within the confines of any rigid social

stratification in which the position of an individual is fixed for ever by the accident of birth, even if untouchability were in truth abolished and the brahman and the sweeper treated as of equal status. There had indeed been a convergence of opinion on the caste question among enlightened Hindus and Christians, but Andrew's rather unwilling difference from Gandhi on the issue shows that there was not yet identity of view.

Since 1940 there have been a few missionaries such as Dick Keithahn[46] who have continued the C. F. Andrews tradition of liberal theology and commitment to the Gandhian and national movement while sometimes retaining a rather tenuous link with the organized church. But the rise of that theological movement which is not altogether misleadingly labelled 'neo-orthodoxy' has had increasing influence among missionaries since the publication in 1938 of Hendrik Kraemer's *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World.* The effects, as shown in the writings of such a distinguished missionary-theologian as Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, have been to affirm the cruciality of the question of the church, and particularly church unity. 'Unity is in order that the world may believe', writes Bishop Newbigin, 'The Church's unity is the sign and instrument of the salvation which Christ has wrought ... in so far as the Church is disunited her life is a direct and public contradiction of the Gospel.'[47] This renewed conviction of the significance of the Church's existence and unity as an essential dimension of the proclamation of the Gospel involved an unqualified acceptance of the now increasingly popular rejection of casteism. And the search for Christian unity and the overcoming of denominational barriers was the belated acceptance of the implications for the Church's order of its own stance on caste.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VII

1 Max Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*. 2nd edn. London, 1868, Vol. I, p.xx. Müller's language is that of German idealism; the 'Christianity' to which he refers is not empirical Christianity but an ideal to which history tends.
2 Ibid., p.xxxi. Statements such as this made Müller less popular among the more conservative missionaries than Monier-Williams.
3 Ibid., p.xxii.
4 Letter dated 25 February, 1894, to Dr. John Murdoch in U.T.C. Archives, Bangalore.
5 Letter dated 31 March 1890 to Dr. John Murdoch, in U.T.C. Archives, Bangalore.
6 Letter of 25 February 1894.
7 See the discussion in Chapter Three.
8 Donald Macleod, *Memoir of Norman Macleod, D.D.* London, 1878, pp. 413-3.
9 Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Religions of the World and their Relations to Christianity*. 6th edn., London, 1886, p.240.
10 Ibid., pp.167-8.
11 For this paragraph, cf. Kaj Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity*. Bangalore and Madras, 1969, pp.71-3.
12 Macleod, op.cit., p.473.
13 Ibid., pp.545-6.
14 Ibid., p.496.
15 Ibid., p.535.
16 Ibid., p.535.
17 Ibid., p.547.
18 See particularly T.E. Slater, *The Philosophy of Missions: A Present Day Plea*. London, 1882. The thought of this book is dominated by the philosophy of progress; Christianity is 'the religion of progress and civilization' which alone satisfies the demands of the age and the needs of all men.
19 See the editorial notes in *Harvest Field*, XVII (1906) p.446.
20 J.D. Maynard, 'The Relation of Missions to Caste', *Harvest Field* XVII (1906), pp.447-459.
21 Lucas's principal writings were: *The Empire of Christ*. London, 1907; *Christ for India*. London, 1910; *Our Task in India*. London, 1914. He also wrote numerous articles, the most important of which for our purposes is 'The Hindu Caste System', in J.P. Jones (ed.), *The Year Book of Missions in India, Burma and Ceylon*. Madras, 1912, pp.89-98. See also T.K. Thomas, 'The Christian Task in India: An Introduction to the Thought of Bernard Lucas', *Religion and Society* XV/3 pp.20-31.
22 *Lucas,* Our Task in India., p.13.
23 Ibid., p.34.

24 Lucas, *The Empire of Christ.* pp.105-7.
25 Lucas, *Christ for India.* p.408.
26 Lucas, 'Hindu Caste System'.
27 There is an excellent critical discussion of Farquhar's thought in Eric J. Sharpe, *Not to Destroy But to Fulfil: The Contribution of J.N. Farquhar to Protestant Missionary Thought in India before 1914.* Uppsala, 1965. See also his *J.N. Farquhar: A Memoir.* Calcutta, 1963, and Kaj Baago, op.cit., chap. V.
28 J.N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism,* London, 1913, p.58.
29 This follows Eric J. Sharpe, *Not to Destroy.* p.339.
30 Farquhar, *Crown,* p.167.
31 Ibid., pp.167-9.
32 Ibid., p.206.
33 J.N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India.* New York, 1915, p.432.
34 Farquhar, *Crown,* p.177.
35 Ibid., pp. 187-191. Farquhar's denial of the possibility of 'a strong, lasting, social order' which is not built upon religious foundations is another point of difference from Lucas. Farquhar has far more in the way of a developed sociological awareness.
36 Ibid., p.192.
37 Of the numerous biographies of Andrews, B. Chaturvedi and M. Sykes, *Charles Freer Andrews.* New York, 1950, is the best. See also Nicol Macnicol, *C.F. Andrews: Friend of India.* London, 1944; M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance.* Bangalore, 1970, pp.225-231, 254-7, 268-9; and now Daniel O'Connor's excellent introductory essay to *The Testimony of C.F. Andrews.* Bangalore and Madras, 1974.
38 C.F. Andrews, *The Renaissance in India.* London, 1912. p.184.
39 Ibid., pp.188-9.
40 C.F. Andrews, *India in Transition.* Delhi, 1910, quoted in M.M. Thomas, op.cit., pp.268-9.
41 Andrews writes of the strength of caste in *World Missionary Conference, 1910, The Missionary Message.* Vol. IV, pp.164-5.
42 Cited in Chaturvedi and Sykes, op.cit., p.251. Cf. M.M. Thomas, op.cit., pp. 274-5.
43 C.F. Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas.* London, 1931, pp. 29, 36, 129, 173, 354-5. For Gandhi's views on caste, see chaps. 8 and 9.
44 C.F. Andrews, *The True India: A Plea for Understanding.* London, 1939, p.99.
45 Ibid., p.151.
46 Ralph Richard Keithahn, *Pilgrimage in India.* Madras, 1973.
47 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of Faith.* London, 1953, pp.149-50.

CHAPTER VIII

HINDU RESPONSES TO THE MISSIONARY ATTACK ON CASTE

It would be easier in many ways to write of Hindu reactions to missionary activities in general, than to attempt to tease out what seems to be a response specifically to missionary attitudes to caste. Missionaries tended, as we have repeatedly had occasion to notice, to regard Hinduism as a huge, closely integrated system of interlocking and interdependent parts. Often they seemed to see themselves as undertaking a frontal attack aimed at destroying and replacing the whole system. Sometimes they operated as if they were seeking out the weak points in the Hindu bastion, among which they usually regarded caste as one, in the hope that the fortress would fall when one substantial breach was made in its defences. Later on, more liberal missionaries saw themselves as concerned with the improvement of the fortifications and the raising of the morale of the defendants; and sometimes reform meant pulling down a tower or battlement and rebuilding it differently. To all these varied approaches to the question of caste there were many and no less varied responses. Sometimes the defenders believed that the fortress was only impregnable if defended as a whole. Others saw parts of the fortress as hard to defend, so that if a tower were abandoned and destroyed the fortress as a whole would be strengthened. A few welcomed the co-operation of their erstwhile assailants in redesigning their ramparts and reviewing the strategy of defence.

A further difficulty in our way is this: missionaries were not the only ones to attack caste or seek its modification. Secular egalitarianism was certainly influential in certain times and places, and there was much in the general impact of the West which challenged the established social order. A few anti-caste movements such as the Dravida Kazhagam in the south were explicitly atheist, and saw caste in missionary fashion as part of a great edifice of superstition which called out for destruction as a whole. And some egalitarian movements within Hinduism have remained influential into recent times, although we do not know as much as we would like about their history. The Dravida Kazhagam, for instance, has some of its roots in Tamil *bhakti* movements such as that of Ramalingaswamy in the nineteenth century, and drew support even when it was most vociferously atheist from many pious Saivites who saw it mainly as the standard-bearer of Tamil renaisance. It is

therefore too simple to regard changing Hindu attitudes towards caste since the early nineteenth century merely as responses to stimuli fed to them by missionaries, or even to assume, with J.N. Farquhar, that 'the stimulating forces are almost exclusively western.'[1] Certainly his statement that 'Christianity has ruled the development throughout' requires qualification. It would be quite false to suggest that missionary attacks on caste have been successful in terms of their stated objectives, and it is by no means clear that they have been the major factor in inducing change, although no one would deny that they have had considerable influence. With great consistency missionaries underestimated the resilience and adaptability of caste, and regarded the problem of replacing it in far too simple a way. Indeed many of them seemed quite blind to changes that were taking place within the caste system, and sometimes they give the appearance of shadow-boxing, as they inveigh against the absurdities and immoralities of caste in a former age. Yet with awareness of difficulties such as those outlined above, it remains true that it is possible to pick out certain Hindu attitudes to caste which are explicitly or fairly obviously in large part responses to Christian opinion or behaviour. These responses come from those who are to all intents and purposes Christians save that they cannot accept baptism if it implies a breach of caste, or from those who seek to defend the full rigours of the traditional caste system; from those who regard the caste question as a tricky problem of social philosophy, or from those whose consciences were roused by seeing what the missions achieved among the depressed classes. We will attempt in this chapter to survey a representative selection of such responses, rather than make any endeavour to cover the whole of this extremely complex field.

We may appropriately start with the towering figure of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of the Brahmo Samaj and the patriarch of the Bengal renaissance. Roy's interests in controversy with missionaries were mainly theological and philosophical, although he shared with them fully in seeking certain measures of social reform – the abolition of *suttee*, or the introduction of English education, for example. He revels in theological arguments about such things as the doctrine of the Trinity, and established his own, highly ethical, conflation of Christianity and Hinduism. He differed from the orthodox Hindus of the day in believing that religious truth and sacred writings should be equally accessible to all regardless of caste: his *Religious Instructions Founded on Sacred Authorities* answered the question, 'To whom is the worship fit to be taught?' by affirming

that 'It may be taught to all, but effect being produced in each person according to his state of mental preparation, it will be proportionately successful.'[2] Furthermore, he cautiously but perceptively criticizes caste by questioning its divine institution and suggesting that God is no respecter of persons, for he 'has equally subjected all living creatures without distinction of caste, rank or wealth to change, disappointment, pain and death, and has equally admitted all to be partakers of the bountiful mercies which he has lavished over nature.'[3] But for all that, Roy does not seem to regard caste as a *major* social evil and never allowed himself to take part in a crusade against it. He believed that caste discouraged the development of patriotic feeling and made it hard for Hindus to take advantage of the new occupational opportunities which were now opening up before them.[4] Missionaries from time to time accused him of cowardice in refusing to break his own caste, or suggested (quite inaccurately, but to their own considerable comfort) that it was caste alone which impeded him from becoming a Christian. But Roy himself refused to exaggerate the importance of the caste question, or to agree with most missionaries that caste was a totally inflexible institution incapable of any kind of adaptation to changed conditions. By concentrating so much energy into an attack on caste the missionaries, he suggests, had ensured that they would have few converts, but it was no 'dread of the loss of caste' alone, fear of the social rejection which baptism entailed, which kept Indians away from the church; more important by far was the fact that the missionaries' doctrines were not rational and 'in several points are equally absurd with the popular Hindoo creed.'[5] Ram Mohan Roy was no protagonist of caste, and never sought zealously to defend it. Caste, he thought, might die or be transfored in the natural course of events, and this would hardly affect the reforms, social and religious, to which he gave priority.

The Brahmo Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj, the two bodies which sought to continue the work of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, were according to J.N. Farquhar, 'the first bodies outside the Christian Church that gave any attention to the depressed classes; but their work has never risen to such dimensions as to make it of great importance.'[6] Debendranath Tagore, in many ways Roy's spiritual heir, did not regard the question of caste as of primary importance. Like Ram Mohan Roy, he believed that the restoration of a true spirituality to Hinduism and the elimination of the more glaring evils were so important that the question of caste, which had been artificially inflated in importance by missionary propaganda, could

wait for later consideration. Furthermore, the Brahmo Samaj itself was composed virtually entirely of members of the higher castes who could see no advantage and very considerable problems arising if they ostentatiously broke caste and cut themselves off effectively from contact with Hindu society.[7] The young and impetuous Keshub Chandra Sen who split with Brahmo Samaj and led his section of it to the very fringes of the church, was very much more outspoken in his antagonism to caste, and this is clearly the result of the Christian influences to which he responded so affirmatively. In describing the stand of his 'New Dispensation' he said: 'Paul was raised by God to break caste, and level the distinctions of race and nationality; and nobly did he fulfil his mission. The Jew and the Gentile he made into one body. The modern Pauls of the new dispensation are carrying on a similar crusade against caste in India. The obnoxious distinctions between Brahmin and Sudra, between Hindu and Yavana, between Asiatic and European, the new gospel of love thoroughly proscribes ... Let there be no antagonism, no exclusion. Let the embankment which each sect, each nation, has raised, be swept away by the flood of cosmopolitan truth, and let all the barriers and partitions which separate man from man be pulled down, so that truth and love and purity may flow freely through millions of hearts and through hundreds of successive generations, from country to country, from age to age. Thus shall the deficiencies of individual and national character be complemented, and humanity shall attain a fuller and more perfect standard of religious and moral life.'[8] The impact of such views among intellectuals was considerable, but on the whole Keshub and the Brahmo Samaj spoke only to the urban upper classes and had little contact with the rural masses, where the effects of caste rigidities were most oppressively evident.

When such a one as Keshub attacked caste he may have used arguments which were virtually identical with those deployed by the missionaries, but more people paid attention, and the impact of his words was more profound. The missionaries, or many of them, saw him as an ally, and not without cause. Norman Macleod, the convener of the Church of Scotland's India Mission, added to his pubished lectures on Indian missions the following extract from Keshub's 'Lectures to the Natives': 'Next to idolatry, and vitally connected with the huge system, is caste. You should deal with it as manfully and unsparingly as with idolatry. That Hindu casteism is a frightful social scourge no one can deny. It has completely and hopelessly wrecked social unity, harmony and happiness, and for centuries it has opposed all social progress. But few seem to think that

it is not so much as a social but as a religious institution that it has become the great scourge it really is. As a system of absurd social distinctions it is certainly pernicious. But when we view it on moral grounds it appears as a scandal to conscience, and all our moral ideas and sentiments rise to execrate it and to demand its immediate extermination. Caste is the bulwark of Hindu idolatry and the safeguard of Brahmanic priesthood. It is an audacious and sacrilegious violation of God's law of human brotherhood. It makes civil distinctions inviolable divine institutions, and in the name of the Holy God sows perpetual discord and enmity among his children.'[9] Such a response which echoed their own sentiments so exactly went far beyond the missionaries' wildest dreams. But Keshub Chandra Sen was not to be the great prophetic figure of the Indian renaissance; that title is more appropriately given to Swami Vivekananda.

Vivekananda provides us with a line of argument which is to be repeated frequently by others. On the one hand he gives a justification for the principle of caste as a functional division within an organic society, claiming that it is one of the great insights which India has to offer to the world. On the other hand, he believes that this inherently good system has become petrified and oppressive, and must be reformed. He argues thus: 'Caste is a natural order. I can perform one duty in social life, and you another; you can govern a country and I can mend a pair of shoes, but there is no reason why you are greater than I, for can you mend my shoes? Can I govern the country? I am clever at mending shoes, you are clever at reading Vedas, but there is no reason why you should trample on my head; why if one commits murder should he be praised, and if another steals an apple why should he be hanged! This will have to go. Caste is good. That is the only natural way of solving life. Men must form themselves into groups, and you cannot get rid of that. Wherever you go there will be caste. But that does not mean that there should be these privileges. They should be knocked on the head. If you teach Vedanta to the fisherman, he will say, I am as good a man as you, I am a fisherman, you are a philosopher, but I have the same God in me as you have in you. And that is what we want, no privileges for anyone, equal chances for all; let everyone be taught that the Divine is within, and every one will work out his own salvation.'[10] One might well ask, however, whether it is really caste which Vivekananda is defending. Certainly he does not write of the contemporary realities of the caste system, or of the tradition. He is quite silent about the hereditary principle, about endogamy, about rules governing social intercourse. Indeed it would appear that what he defends as caste is

simply a division of labour or a functional grouping within society, with the added utopian requirement (later echoed by Gandhi) that all occupations or 'castes' should have parity of esteem, and by implication that the whole business of purity and impurity should be set aside along with the hierarchical principle. He is reinterpreting the tradition in such a way as to enable it to meet effectively the arguments directed against caste, particularly by missionaries. But he does more: he contrasts caste *as he has reinterpreted it* with western society, much to the disadvantages of the latter: 'Competition – cruel, cold and heartless – is the law of Europe. Our law is caste – the breaking of competition, checking its forces, mitigating its cruelties, smoothing the passage of the human soul through this mystery of life.'[11]

Elsewhere, indeed, Vivekananda does make it clear that he is unhappy with caste as he finds it around him because it is rigid, makes man 'a slave of society', and obstructs any kind of social progress.[12] Perhaps more importantly, caste for him obstructs the growth of a true national feeling based on a sense of unity and brotherhood: 'Forget not', he writes, 'that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler, the sweeper, are thy flesh and blood, thy brothers. Thou brave one, be bold, take courage, be proud that thou art an Indian, and proudly proclaim: "I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother." Say: "The ignorant Indian, the poor and destitute Indian, the Brahman Indian, the Pariah Indian, is my brother."'[13] Because of its modern perversion, caste is now only 'filling the atmosphere with its stench'.[14]

From the late nineteenth century the debate about caste took on a less academic quality, for it was recognized that the caste question and the problem of what to do about the depressed classes were closely connected. Those who took seriously the degradation of the depressed classes and were deeply disturbed by it could not but ask how far this situation was caused by caste. The uneasy conscience of the educated about the condition of the poorest quickly made it almost inconceivable that the caste system should any longer find unqualified support among intellectuals. To a considerable extent this change of mood was based on the information and anger about the situation so persistently disseminated by missionaries, but another factor which lent urgency to the Hindu response was the rapidily increasing scale of conversions from the ranks of the depressed classes. Gokhale may fairly be taken to represent the new feeling that the condition of 'the low Castes' is 'so deeply deplorable that it constitutes a grave blot on our social arrangements...

We may touch a cat, we may touch a dog, we may touch any other animal, but the touch of these human beings is pollution. And so complete is the mental degradation of these people that they themselves see nothing in such treatment to resent, that they acquiesce in it as though nothing better than that was their due.'[15] He then goes on to call for a great effort on the part of the educated for the uplift of the depressed. For reasons of simple humanity and of national self-interest, the system which keeps the untouchables in their degradation must be broken.

Another response to the problem of the depressed was that of Dayananda Saraswati and his Arya Samaj. Dayananda wished to restore the Vedic ordering of things, and this involved replacing the innumerable castes, or *jathis,* of contemporary Indian society with the four *varnas*. These were not, however, to be hereditary, but each person would be allocated to a *varna* according to his *guna* (qualities), *karma* (deeds), and *swabhava* (temperament).[16] This scheme involved retaining the hierarchical structure and recognizing differences of status, although to be sure Dayananda himself argued that the status of the lowest should be improved. But the Arya Samaj, while devoting itself to the reconversion and reintegration into Hindu society, which meant caste society, of those, mainly from the ranks of the Untouchables, who had been converted to Christianity or Islam, did not modify its own deference to caste distinctions. The Arya Samaj did not want to break with Hindu society, but to reform it from within, yet as long as it continued to permit its members to observe caste distinctions its appeal to depressed caste converts was not considerable. Although there were two schisms on the issue of the Samaj's attitude towards caste, the Samaj as a whole held to Dayananda's hope that the present system might gradually be transformed into his ideal of *varnavyavastha.*[17]

Mahatma Gandhi's position seems to start from a kind of conflation of Vivekananda's and Saraswati's views. He affirms *varna*, seeks to reform caste, and assails untouchability as an excrescence on Hindu society. Gandhi's moral passion is never more intense than when he speaks of the evils of untouchability, 'the curse of Hinduism and therefore India .. the root cause of our downfall and of Hindu-Muslim discord.'[18] And Gandhi not only wrote and spoke against untouchability; he acted. In 1933, he fasted for the Harijan cause which he spoke of as a 'religious battle against untouchability.'[19] A number of satyagrahas were specifically directed against untouchability, particularly the Vykom Satyagraha of 1924 and 1925, the immediate object of which was the opening of

certain roads around the Vykom temple in Travancore to Harijans. And he personally identified himself with the lowest of the low, frequently living in *bhangi* (sweeper) quarters of towns and sharing their life in a way which the more traditional high-caste Hindus still regarded as polluting.

Gandhi saw the battle against untouchability as essentially a religious one, which was the special and exclusive concern of Hindus. He called for a change of heart among caste Hindus, an act of expiation to those they had for centuries oppressed and degraded. Non-Hindus had no part to play in this. When George Joseph, a Christian as his name indicates, was about to take over the leadership of the Vykom Satyagraha, Gandhi wrote to him: 'As to Vykom, I think that you shall let the Hindus do the work. It is they who have to purify themselves. You can help by your sympathy and by your pen, but not by organizing the movement and certainly not by offering Satyagraha. If you refer to the Congress resolution of Nagpur, it calls upon the Hindu members to remove the curse of untouchability.'[20] A hidden motive in Gandhi's mind may well have been the still very live threat of conversions to Christianity on a gigantic scale from the ranks of the Harijans, but he sounds strangely like some of the missionaries in his insistence that the problem of untouchability is really a *religious* problem, and its only solution is a change of heart. But whereas missionaries, when pressed, would often say that the change of heart meant conversion, and was most likely to occur among the Harijans, Gandhi called for a change of heart which was a 'conversion' to a purified Hinduism *on the part of the high castes*. This, he believed, would so affect their behaviour and attitudes that they would alter their behaviour so that the problem quickly disappeared. He firmly believed that his primarily religious approach would lead more quickly to an enhancement of the social and economic position of the Harijans than would more direct efforts at social, educational and economical uplift.

In practice, therefore, Gandhi's assault on untouchability aimed more at a change of heart among the high-caste people than at any direct and immediate change, religious, economic or social, among the Harijans. He was severely critical of Harijans who spoke of conversion to another faith as a possible way of escape from untouchability, and even more caustic in his attacks on those who sought to make converts among Harijans. This was an internal religious issue, a kind of family quarrel within Hinduism, and to opt out was escapist, while to concentrate on non-religious factors was to

neglect the primary significance of the Harijan uplift movement as the one way in which the body of Hinduism was to be purified.[21]

Not unexpectedly, many people questioned the adequacy of Gandhi's strategy for dealing with untouchability. Ambedkar, from the very beginning, demanded statutory protection, and positive discrimination by government on behalf of the Untouchables, and was deeply suspicious of those who believed that a fundamental change of heart which was widely enough diffused among caste Hindus to have a noticeable effect could be achieved simply be persuasion. Gandhi professed himself to be unworried by the knowledge that the vast majority of Harijans were disappointed at the fruits of his 'epic struggle' against untouchability, and were more interested in tangible social, political, economic and educational results than in a process of religious self-purification within Hinduism from which many of them felt deeply alienated.[22]

The Harijans' suspicions that Gandhi did not seek as radical or as material a change as they desired was not without foundation. Gandhi was antagonistic to the present shape of the caste system, but not to *varna* as such. Caste had become polluted by its tolerance of untouchability and by the rigidity with which it allocated esteem and rewards according to one's status in society. All honest occupations should have equal esteem, for they are equally necessary to the well-being of society. Thus he could write: 'It is the Bhangi who enables society to live. The Brahmin's duty is to look after the sanitation of the soul, the Bhangi's that of the body of society.'[23] The Vykom Satyagraha was 'a movement to purify caste by ridding it of its most pernicious result. I personally belive in Varnashrama, though it is true I have my own meaning for it.'[24] It is not altogether a simple operation to work out precisely what Gandhi did mean by 'varnashrama', but it seems to have included a belief that each should follow 'the hereditary calling of his forefathers, in so far as it is not inconsistent with fundamental ethics.'[25] Varnas are therefore occupational divisions of society formed on a hereditary basis. Varna repudiates both the mobility and the competitiveness of western society. But once untouchability has been removed, will there remain any difference of status between the various varnas? Gandhi's reply is rather ambiguous. By accepting varnashrama he has committed himself to a hereditary occupational division of society in which there is interdependence and co-operation rather than competition and mobility. But Varna traditionally is a hierarchical system, and Gandhi seems to accept this, at least in some of his moods; at other times he talks of an individual's worth as if it were simply a matter of

moral excellence quite independent of caste considerations. On the whole his final conclusion seems to be something like this: All occupations are equally useful to society and one can serve God equally well through the fulfilment of the duties of any station. Once this principle becomes generally accepted the degradation of the sweeper and the untouchable will be removed because all will treat and regard him as a useful and dignified member of the community, entitled to the same respect as everyone else. Interestingly enough, Gandhi never, as far as we know, speaks of any occupations such as removing human ordure as inherently degrading and undesirable; the author of *Hind Swaraj* cannot see the introduction of modern sewage disposal as a help to social advancement or an incentive to the uplift of the *bhangis*; all he will say is that if the *bhangi* fulfils his ancestral occupation well, he is equal to the most pious Brahman. It is not hard to see why this view did not prove widely popular among Harijans. At least on the caste issue, Gandhi appears as a very conservative reformer. But such remarks do not detract from our recognition of the integrity and intensity of his moral fervour for the cause of the untouchables. To seek for the roots of this passion would lead us further afield than we are at present able to stray.

If Gandhi's thought on caste is dominated throughout by his horror at the stark reality of untouchability, and his defence of *varna* is qualified by his conviction that caste requires purification, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's earlier writings on caste represent a remarkably vigorous defence both of *varna* and of the present realities of caste against Christian and secular attacks. He argues that a caste society is superior to the fluid, competitive, insecure, materialist society of the Christian West. Gandhi's views were certainly strongly influenced by his experiences in South Africa. Having sought to defend his countrymen against racial oppression and unbridled discrimination in Africa, he was consistent enough to realize that he could not tolerate the same style of behaviour directed against a large segment of the Hindu population of India by fellow Hindus. But Radhakrishnan's early writings are notable for their lack of concern with the question of untouchability, and indeed for their remoteness from the hard facts of caste. He operates on a highly abstract plane, and seeks to construct philosophical and ethical justifications for Hindu social order. Radhakrishnan's encounter with Christianity was very real and profound, but it was mainly at the metaphysical and theological level. He does not even appear to have been deeply disturbed by the condition of the depressed classes, or challenged by what Christians and others were doing among them,

until later in his life, when he became very much more politically involved.

In *The Hindu View of Life* (1927) we find a thoroughgoing *apologia* for caste which reads very much like a justification of *apartheid,* and which Radhakrishnan strangely never saw fit to repudiate. Caste may have some defects, but these are not fundamental; in its essence caste represents what is best in the Hindu ethos: 'The institution of caste', he writes, 'illustrates the spirit of comprehensive synthesis characteristic of the Hindu mind with its faith in the collaboration of races and the co-operation of cultures. Paradoxical as it may seem, the system of caste is the outcome of tolerance and trust. Though it has now degenerated into an instrument of oppression and intolerance, though it tends to perpetuate inequality and develop the spirit of exclusiveness, these unfortunate effects are not the central motives of the system.'[26] We do not hear much more of the evils of caste, but a great deal of the evils of non-caste societies. The caste system, we are told, provides a satisfying answer to racial and class conflict, by insulating the various groups from each other and ensuring that they do not come into competition. While the rest of the world has seen bloody racial wars and the extermination or brutal suppression of minorities, in India different peoples with different cultures at different stages of development have learned how to coexist happily with each other. Thus cultural diversity was preserved and the distinctive genius of each group saved from disturbance. The fusion or assimilation of the various groups to each other is neither likely nor desirable, but India has discovered the way to avoid bloody and impoverishing conflict: 'the only safe course of democracy, viz. that each racial group should be allowed to develop the best in it without impeding the progress of others. Every historical group is unique and specific and has an ultimate value, and the highest morality requires that we should respect its individuality. Caste, on its radical side, is the affirmation of the infinite diversity of human groups.'[27] Furthermore, caste plays a eugenic role: 'The Hindu thinkers, perhaps through a lucky intuition or an empirical generalization, assumed the fact of heredity and encouraged marriages among those who are of approximately the same type and quality.'[28] In a rather obscure passage, Radhakrishnan defends caste endogamy.

Although he has praised caste as a characteristic product of the Hindu mind, he also affirms that 'Caste on its social side is a product of human organization and not a mystery of divine appointment.'[29] His rationale of caste is indeed almost entirely secular, and he makes

it clear when he proceeds to compare caste society with western society that caste could exist even without the context of Hindu faith. As a good idealist, he believes in an organic society, and it is as such that he presents caste. It transcends individualism and overcomes competitiveness: 'the law of social life should not be cold and cruel competition, but harmony and co-operation. Society is not a field of rivalry among individuals. The castes are not allowed to compete with each other.'[30] In a caste society work is a vocation of service to the common good. It is true, he admits, that some defects have crept in: the 'spiritual status and equality' of the various castes has sometimes been challenged; there have been instances of groups condemned to degradation. But these are perversions which should not blind us to the fact that the principles of caste are right, and, for good measure, democratic.

A decade later, in *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (1939), the message is basically the same, but there are subtle and significant changes of emphasis. Radhakrishnan now speaks of classes, not of caste, and writing in less popular style, his idealist presuppositions become more explicit. The Hindu tradition of classes has been corrupted: 'The caste system is a degeneration of the class idea. It does not admit that the individual has the right to determine his future and pursue his interests. Though idealistic in its origin, beneficient in large tracts of its history, still helpful in some ways, it has grown out of harmony with our present conditions, owing to arrested development and lack of elasticity. The compulsory degradation of a large part of mankind is revolting to the refined natures who have a sense of the dignity of man and respect for the preciousness of human life. The right of every human soul to enter into the full spiritual heritage of the race must be recognized. Caste is a source of discord and mischief, and if it persists in its present form, it will affect with weakness and falsehood the people that cling to it.'[31] The criticism of the present state of Indian society is now much more severe; but the value and relevance of the traditional Hindu social order is also expressed more vehemently, probably on both counts showing the influence of Gandhi's thought. The 'class' of the Indian tradition now appears as the best conceivable structure for an organic society, in which individualism is not triumphant, but is allocated a proper place. Society is not 'an ant-heap or a beehive' in which the individual is enslaved to the demands of the group, nor is it a disorderly collection of atomic individuals. The fourfold *varna* system expresses perennial truths about a healthy social order: 'spiritual wisdom, executive power, skilled production, and devoted

service are the indispensable elements of any social order. It is the function of the wise to plan the social order, of the powerful to sanction it, i.e. back it with authority which has force behind it, of the skilled to execute it or carry it out with the help of the devoted workers. The fourfold classification is conceived in the interests of world progress. It is not intended specially for the Hindus, but applies to the whole human race, which has one destiny which it seeks and increasingly attains through the countless millenniums of history.'[32]

One of the abidingly significant lessons of *varna* is that the intellectuals have political responsibilities, they are indeed in Radhakrishnan's thought the Guardians who can distinguish between national interest and objective truth, and see to it, with the practical co-operation of the Kshatriyas, that the society is founded on truth rather than expediency. But along with this rather old-fashioned political Platonism there goes in Radhakrishnan an assertion that the Indian tradition was democratic in a more true sense that the West has ever been. He uses the concept of democracy in an unusual way, and gives it a somewhat idiosyncratic content. Democracy, it would appear, has to do with cultural richness and brotherly feeling within a society: certainly it is not competitive, and presents no challenge to the hegemony of the intellectuals. But let Radhakrishnan speak for himself: 'In a real sense the fourfold scheme is democratic. Firstly, it insists on the spiritual equality of all men. It assumes that within every human creature there is a self which has the right to grow in its own way, to find itself, and make its life a full and satisfied image and instrument of its being. Secondly, it makes for individuality in the positive sense. Individuality is attained not through an escape from limitations but through the willing acceptance of obligations. It is erroneous to assume that only the aberrant or the anarchical is the true individual. Thirdly, it points out that all work is socially useful and from an economic standpoint equally important. Fourthly, social justice is not a scheme of rights but of opportunities. It is wrong to assume that democracy requires all men to be alike .. Fifthly, the essence of democracy is consideration for others. Freedom for the individual means restrictions on absolute power. No one class can make unlimited claims ...'[33] The rhetoric is magnificent, but the argument is not altogether clear, and one has to shake oneself to remember that he is speaking about *varna* at all. And it is hard to understand how such an idyllic order of society might degenerate into what Radhakrishnan now calls caste, simply by birth acquiring greater importance.[34]

By 1947 Radhakrishnan had moved to a position where he was more passionately critical of the actualities of caste, and in particular of the treatment of Harijans: 'The sin of untouchability is degrading and the prejudice should be removed ... Any discrimination against the Harijans is unjustified ... Places of worship, public wells, and public utilities such as cremation grounds and bathing ghats, hotels and educational institutions should be open to all ... What is being done today is a question not of justice or charity, but of atonement. Even when we have done all that is in our power, we shall not have atoned even for a small fraction of our guilt in this matter.'[35] The voice is Gandhi's voice, but the hands are the hands of Radhakrishnan! Radhakrishnan's arguments on caste and *varna* are vigorous but singularly incoherent, and because they so rarely impinge on any practical issue they have an air of irrelevance. A restoration of *varna* is almost beyond the bounds of possibility in modern India, and the philosophical attacks on caste do no damage to an institution which is ever anew demonstrating its amazing resilience and adaptability. The owl of Minerva indeed takes flight after the sun has set, and many of Radhakrishnan's points would have been relevant and challenging in the debates on caste of many decades earlier, but when he wrote they had little practical significance save as part of a favourable presentation of the Indian tradition to a western audience.[36]

Those who most fully echoed the major part of the Christian critique of caste were the secularists such as Jawaharlal Nehru, K.M. Pannikar or E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker. Such men were not inhibited in their thought by any need to preserve the Hindu religion, and indeed the rampant atheism of Ramaswamy Naicker's Dravida Kazhagam saw the situation and the strategy very much in the same terms as had the missionaries: caste is an integral part of brahmanical Hinduism, and in all probability its Achilles' heel. Therefore an attack on caste is the most sensible way of undercutting the whole edifice of Hindu superstitition. For Naicker and for Nehru the most offensive thing about caste is its denial of equality; for all the secular opponents of caste it is the great obstacle in the way of progress. They assail caste, as did the missionaries, on religious, social, and ethical grounds, and seek to replace it with a rational, egalitarian and democratic social order.

Nehru recognizes that vast changes are taking place in India such that 'it seems impossible for the caste system to endure.'[37] These changes which affect Indian society so profoundly are not the results of the philosopher's speculations or the charitable acts of religious

men but of 'basic economic changes which have shaken up the whole fabric of Indian society and are likely to upset it completely.'[38] Hence, 'It has ceased to be a question of whether we like caste or dislike it. Changes are taking place in spite of our likes and dislikes. But it is certainly in our power to mould these changes and direct them, so that we can take full advantage of the character and genius of the Indian people as a whole, which have been so evident in the cohesiveness and stability of the social organization they have built up.'[39] The destruction of caste, which is virtually inevitable, might well lead to a chaotic disruption of social life unless something in the way of a new social structure, adapted both to the demands of modern times and to the genius of the Indian people, were to be put in its place. The old caste system, to be sure, had much that was good in it. It never fell victim to the morbid individualism of the west. It tolerated diversity. It produced a society which was non-competitive and non-acquisitive. Democracy was allowed within each caste, and although the system as a whole was hierarchical, the internal structure of each caste was egalitarian. But the system as such was opposed to democracy and gradually become morbidly rigid. Above all, 'the ultimate weakness and failing of the caste system and the Indian social structure were that they degraded a mass of human beings and gave them no opportunities to get out of that condition – educationally, culturally or economically. That degradation brought deterioration all along the line including in its scope even the upper classes. It led to the petrification which became a dominant feature of India's economy and life ... In the context of society today, the caste system and much that goes with it are wholly incompatible, reactionary, restrictive, and barriers to progress. There can be no equality in status and opportunity within its framework, nor can there be political democracy and much less economic democracy. Between these two conceptions conflict is inherent and only one of them can survive.'[40] Nehru is quite clear that it is caste which is doomed and democracy which will survive, so clear indeed that for him the urgent task is no longer to assail and criticize caste but to think and plan for the new social structure which is to take its place, and which will not be a slavish imitation of the West, but rooted in Indian conditions, past as well as present. He has no patience with those who see caste as right in its principles and needing only to be stripped of some superficial accretions. He does not go along with Gandhi's advocacy of *varnashramadharma*, and sees the real but unintended effect of Gandhi's efforts as the undermining of the

whole structure of caste.[41] The spirit of the age is sure to triumph, and this is the spirit of equality.

K.M. Panikkar argues on roughly similar lines. Caste is quite clearly separable from the Hindu religion, he believes, so that there are no legitimate religious objections to tampering with the caste system. And it needs to be reformed, indeed to be destroyed. For caste is totally incompatible with democracy, and it would be naive to believe that a new social order such as is universally desired can be constructed in India without the destruction of caste. It offends against the principle of democracy, it condemns millions to degradation, it obstructs education and progress. Since caste is not a religious institution but rather a petrified relic of the past which has only persisted because Hindu society has for centuries lacked the political authority necessary if it were to reform itself, a religious attack on caste is irrelevant, whether it takes the Gandhian or the Christian form. Panikkar sees the only hope for Hindu religion in its total separation from any form of caste or *varna*. He is more interested than Nehru in the future of Hindu society and Hindu religion to be sure, but they are entirely at one in declaring that caste must go, and that the instruments which will speed it on its way will be legislation, industrialization and education rather than the religious techniques of Gandhi or the missionaries.[42]

NOTES TO CHAPTER VIII

1 J.N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India.* New York, 1915, p.433.
2 J.C. Ghose (ed.), *The English Works of Raja Ram Mohan Roy.* Calcutta, 1885, Vol. 1, p.161.
3 Ibid., Vol. II. p.5.
4 Ronald W. Scott, *Social Ethics in Modern Hinduism.* Calcutta, 1953, pp.34-5.
5 Ghose, op.cit., Vol. I, pp.257-8.
6 Farquhar, op.cit., p.372.
7 Ibid., pp.41-44.
8 Wm. Theodore de Bary, *Sources of the Indian Tradition.* New York, 1958, Vol. II. pp.74-5.
9 Norman Macleod, *Lectures on Christian Missions in India.* Edinburgh, 1868, pp.92-3.
10 de Bary, op.cit., p.97.
11 Vivekananda, *Complete Works.* Vol. III, p.205, cited in Dennis Dalton, 'The Gandhian View of Caste, and Caste after Gandhi', in Philip Mason, ed., *India and Ceylon: Unity and Diversity.* London, 1967, p. 167.
12 Scott, op.cit., p.34.
13 de Bary, op.cit., p.107.
14 Cited in Scott, op.cit., p.34.
15 Speech cited in de Bary, op.cit., pp.146-7.
16 J.R. Graham, *The Arya Samaj as a Reformation in Hinduism with Special Reference to Caste.* Yale Ph.D., 1943, unpublished thesis.
17 Ibid., passim; also Farquhar, op.cit., esp. p.371.
18 *Harijan,* 25 May 1940, cited in M.K. Gandhi, *Non-violent Resistance.* New York, 1961, p.372. For a perceptive account of the development of Gandhi's views on caste, see Dennis Dalton, op.cit., pp. 159-181.
19 *Harijan*, 4 March 1937, cited in M.K. Gandhi, op.cit., p.317.
20 *Young India*, 1 May 1924, cited in M.K. Gandhi, op.cit., p.180.
21 See Scott, op.cit., pp.173-4.
22 Ibid., pp.175, 177.
23 *Harijan*, 28 November 1936, cited in Scott, op.cit. p.179.
24 *Young India,* 1 May 1924, cited in M.K. Gandhi, op.cit., p.185.
25 *Harijan*, 16 November 1935, cited in Scott, op.cit., p.169.
26 S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life.* London, 1961, p.67. Similarities will be noted to the thought on caste of Radhakrishnan's fellow idealist, Max Müller.
27 Ibid., p.70.
28 Ibid., p.73.
29 Ibid., p.76.
30 Ibid., p.79.

31 S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*. 2nd edn. London, 1940, p.378.
32 Ibid., p.356.
33 Ibid., pp.367-8.
34 Ibid., p.371.
35 S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society*, London, 1947, pp.134-5. Cf. Paul A. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*. New York, 1952, p.842.
36 On Radhakrishnan's social thought see the essays by B.K. Mallik and A.R. Wadia in Schilpp, op.cit., and S.J. Samartha, *Introduction to Radhakrishnan*. New Delhi, 1964, pp.59-68.
37 J. Nehru. *The Discovery of India*. London, 1960, p.242.
38 Ibid., pp.241-2.
39 Ibid., p.242.
40 Ibid., p.253.
41 Ibid., pp.110-111, 534.
42 See his books, *Hindu Society at Crossroads*. London, 1955; *Caste and Democracy; Asia and Western Dominance*. London, 1959, esp. pp.244-5.

CHAPTER IX

INDIAN CHRISTIANS' ATTITUDES TO CASTE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

(i) The Twentieth Century Context

The fifteenth of August 1947, the day on which India gained her independence at the cost of the trauma of partition, marks the watershed of Indian history in the twentieth century. The first half of the century was a period of growing nationalism, in which both the intensity and the diffusion of national feeling were vastly increased. What at the start of the century had been largely a cultural nationalism confined to a small intellectual elite and usually qualified by professions of loyalty to the British Raj had by the late twenties become an explicit demand for Swaraj backed by massive popular support. The cultural and religious renaissances which had been a feature of the nineteenth century in a number of regions starting with Bengal became in the twentieth century emphatically political, for the rediscovered pride in Indian culture made alien rule an ever more intolerable affront.

The new spirit could not but affect the churches, although rather belatedly and to begin with peripherally, for most missions had developed strongly paternalist structures which made it difficult for Christians to identify themselves with the national movement without drawing down the wrath of the mission authorities.[1] Most missions saw their destinies as closely bound up with the continuance of the Raj, and it was only a minority of Indian Christians who saw the national movement in positive terms and identified themselves with it. This minority, however, included a number of very remarkable men and the questions they posed about the role of the church in relation to India's national aspirations and about the alien control of most branches of the Indian church had a cumulative and liberating effect. Even if it took a long time to shake missionary dominance in the churches, nevertheless, it was increasingly obvious that there was less intellectual dependence on the missionaries and Indian Christians were far less likely merely to reflect the theological and social views of the missionaries than had been the case in the nineteenth century. Indian Christian thought, instead of being largely derivative, became markedly more independent, more creatively related to the Indian cultural context, and consequently more distinctive. For the most part it was worked out either

independently of the missionaries or in an equal and co-operative dialogue with those missionaries who were identified with the new mood of the nation. It is also true that in the twentieth century more Indians were able to encounter contemporary European theology directly for themselves without it having been passed through a 'missionary filter', and as a consequence a number of Indians began to contribute to good effect to international and ecumenical theological debates. Their distinctive viewpoint was not slow to show its value. Because of this new situation of dialogue – Indian theology in dialogue with Hinduism, with missionary thinkers, with European and Anglo-Saxon theology – it might well seem rather misleading to discuss Indian Christian thinkers by themselves: it is really impossible to make sense of C.F. Andrews without considering S.K. Rudra and Mahatma Gandhi, or P.D. Devanandan without Hendrik Kraemer, or M.M. Thomas without Lesslie Newbigin, to choose a few samples at random. Indeed it is only considerations of space which constrain us to discuss the Indians and the expatriates separately at this point, and we must remember that they now thought in a common ideological context and interacted with each other in increasingly fruitful fashion.

The present century has been a period of dramatic and sometimes tempestuous change in western theology. The early years of the century were the Indian summer (!) of liberal theology – if one may use that phrase in a highly ambiguous fashion to denote both the late and final flowering of liberalism in Europe and the simultaneous high summer in India which was to be followed there with a very much lengthier autumn. Ernst Troeltsch was probably the most significant twentieth-century liberal theologian in Europe in the area of our present interest. His early affirmations that 'Christianity is the pinnacle of all religious development thus far and the basis and presupposition for every distinct and meaningful development in man's religious life in the future.'[2] and that 'Christianity remains *the* great revelation of God to men, though the other religions, with all the power they possess for lifting men above guilt, grief and earthly life, are likewise revelations of God'[3] were later modified. His historical studies leading to his *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (1912) together, one may suppose, with a reconsideration of the significant role attributed to culture and the concept of nationality in much nineteenth-century German theology, led him to a very much stronger awareness of the significance of cultural and ethnic factors in the shaping of religious ideas which made impossible any real affirmation of the absoluteness of

Christianity: 'A religion, in the several forms assumed by it, always depends upon the intellectual, social, and national conditions among which it exists ... A study of the non-Christian religions convinced me more and more that their naive claims to absolute validity are also genuinely such ... though the particular character of each has been *determined* by the historical, geographical and social conditions of the countries in which it has taken shape.'[4] Troeltsch's position with its emphasis on national and cultural factors has much in common with the theology undergirding the nineteenth-century Lutheran missionaries' more tolerant attitude towards caste and Indian cultural and social forms generally,[5] but he went far further in questioning the absoluteness of Christianity. Nonetheless, views such as Troeltsch's were extremely influential in the twentieth century in arousing a thoroughgoing reconsideration of the theology of mission which had substantial implications for attitudes towards the caste question.

What we will (in spite of its inadequacies and for lack of a better term) call the neo-orthodox reaction against liberal theology started in Europe in the early twenties, but its impact in India – which was to be considerable – was not really felt until the late 1930s. Karl Barth has said that what first awakened him to the inadequacies of the liberal theology in which he had been trained was the discovery that almost all his theological teachers had put their names to a statement endorsing in a singularly unqualified fashion the German cause in the First World War. The shock of this caused him to suspect any theology which could give an unconditional blessing to national aspirations and had difficulty in distinguishing between the Gospel and culture. The development of the new purist theology, to use Barr's phrase,[6] found its justification in the period of the rise of Nazism: liberal theology showed itself incapable of issuing an uncompromising denunciation of Hitler, and a number of liberal theologians played along with him and with his German Christian movement. It was the neo-orthodox who could, at the Synod of Barmen, proclaim an absolute denunciation of Nazi idolatry as a consequence of their absolute affirmation of the validity of the revelation of God in Christ. Barth's subsequent discussion of the problem of religion is worlds distant from that of Troeltsch, uncompromising in its confident assertion and its abiding suspicion of religion, especially when it becomes subservient to culture, philosophy or nationalism.

This is not the place for an assessment of neo-orthodoxy, although it may be mentioned in passing that even in Barth theology was not as

thoroughly purified from philosophical and cultural influences as many people at the time believed. Suffice it to say that neo-orthodoxy, mediated to India principally through Henrik Kraemer's book, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (1938)[7], came to India as something of a bolt from the blue: on the one hand it served to strengthen those who believed that the Church was the bearer of a vitally true and relevant message which was the same in all times and in all cultural contexts, and on the other hand it led to questioning of any relationship to Hinduism or Indian culture which involved an element of accommodation lest the Christian message might thereby degenerate into syncretism or ethnic idolatry. For P.D. Devanandan and many others besides, Kraemer's book meant 'a personal spiritual experience almost amounting to a conversion from a vague Christian philosophy of religion to the deeper dimensions of the ethics and eschatology of a radical Christian faith.'[8] Not that Kraemer was widely acceptable to Indian Christian thinkers – although many of them saw his work and neo-orthodoxy generally with its claim of a radical discontinuity between the Christian revelation and the multifarious and often ambiguous phenomena of 'religion' as a salutary corrective to sometimes rather naive and woolly theologies of interreligious sharing. But if neo-orthodoxy made people chary of the dangers of compromising the Gospel, its practical consequence was sometimes a withdrawal from contacts outside the church visible, despite the fact that its explicit intention was to proclaim the universality of Christ's lordship over all things, not only over what is labelled religious. Many Indian Christian thinkers rejected Kraemer; some gave him a qualified recognition as a corrective; only a very few became his disciples. But increasingly since the 1940s the task has been seen as one of formulating a theology which does not evade the challenge of Kraemer but passes beyond him.

Indian theology in the twentieth century has been obliged to tackle problems presented by the large numbers of 'mass movement' conversions from the Depressed Classes. These continued at a very significant level in many parts of India well into the 1930s and are to be interpreted, as we have argued earlier, as a response on the part of the most underprivileged and degraded sections of society to the uncompromising opposition to caste and affirmation of the equality and dignity of man which had characterized most of the Protestant denominations since the mid-nineteenth century. The kind of theological issues raised were these: how was the church in its internal structure to maintain and express unity, when on top of the imported

denominational divisions was added the existence of large groups of Christians who maintained within the church much of their caste organization and consciousness of belonging to a caste as well as the church? Was there a real danger that the new divisive forces might fragment the church yet further, allowing it to disappear into Hindu society as a multitude of little caste-sects? It became increasingly obvious that if the church were to maintain a social witness it must not only develop ways of combatting 'casteism' within the church effectively, but must seek church unity with an urgency far greater than in the west. The mass-movement conversions also posed questions concerning the mission of the church. As resources became increasingly concentrated on the mass-movement areas it became the assumption of many that the primary, if not the only, Christian task was to increase its numerical strength. Other ways of making a Christian witness in society such as the slow *praeparatio evangelica* of the Christian colleges, or concern for the political, economic and social welfare of the nation as a whole, tended to be neglected in favour of the quick returns of the mass-movement areas. The attitude of the Depressed Classes, it was felt, provided a totally convincing justification of the uncompromising opposition to caste and, by implication, the radical distinction between Christianity and all things Hindu. This view was not, of course, by any means universally accepted, but those who inaugurated the ashram movement, continued intellectual work among the educated classes, or involved themselves in the national movement had to develop a theological critique of the exclusive emphasis on mass movements.

If the church were not to assimilate to the caste system by tolerating caste there was the alternative possibility that it might instead operate as a 'community', in the Indian sense of the term – a group the composition of which is defined by religion and which operates in competition with other communities in the pursuit of economic, social and educational advantages for its members. Indian politics had for long had a communal flavour, although Christians had been far too few in number (except in Kerala) to play any role in competitive communal politics until the mass movements both increased the numbers of Christians – significantly in some areas – and also threatened a major redistribution of numerical influence between communities which would among other effects greatly strengthen the bargaining position of the Muslims since almost all the Christian converts had been at least technically Hindus. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 and the suggestions for communal electorates under the 1935 Government of India Act made

the issue yet more pressing. Conversion inevitably had a political dimension and there were significant Christian thinkers who cast a critical eye at the mass-movement strategy because they feared the consequence of the church becoming a community in conscious opposition to the Hindu community, concerned exclusively for its own growth and welfare rather than for the wider good of the nation. Surely it was possible, the critics asked, for Christians to share with concerned Hindus and Muslims a disinterested care for the welfare of the Depressed Classes, and to be involved to the full with those of other faiths in the national renaissance.

The problem continued after Independence as Christians struggled to understand their role as a small minority in a secular or religiously neutral state. The irrelevance of western denominational distinctions became increasingly obvious and the struggle against casteism within the church continued with varying success. The prophets of doom expected the rapid fragmentation of India, and a divided Church could hardly speak a relevant word to a nation seeking dynamic unity if it were itself even more deeply fragmented. But as the church began to set its own house in order it was realized that this again posed the basic choice: either the church could provide an attractive demonstration that fellowship in diversity was possible, or the church could become an increasingly effective political entity, seeking its own at the expense of others. Independence also meant an increased and more equal Indian participation in the theological give-and-take of the ecumenical movement, the mood of which throughout the fifties and well into the sixties was predominantly Barthian. And one can sense some tones of disillusion: it becomes steadily more obvious that even the most apparently 'purist' theology is strongly culturally conditioned, and the idiom of ecumenical theology remained very western and often did not 'speak to the Indian condition'.

A further factor of which Indian Christian thinking on caste had to take account was the increasing questioning of the caste system and rejection of untouchability as the century drew on, culminating in the constitutional abolition of untouchability and the protective legislation for the Scheduled Castes and tribes in independent India. It rapidly became unfashionable to defend the caste system, and even the most orthodox and old-fashioned Hindus hesitated to challenge the new secular egalitarianism. In a very real sense this was indeed a triumph for the Christian Church, although too much must not be claimed – other, secular and Gandhian, influences played a most important role in the transformation of public feeling. Nor must we

forget that it was a change of feeling which did not always reflect a change in practice: there is an element of the fantastic in claims, so frequently reiterated today in influential quarters, that caste no longer exists, or lingers on bereft of power and influence. It is clear that caste is still immensely effective and is far more capable of adapting itself to modernity in such a way as to manipulate institutions like democratic or local government than had been thought possible at the turn of the century. Nevertheless, the fact that it has become unfashionable to defend caste, and that the influence of caste is now commonly regarded as a malignant growth, represent a most important change. And in the new mood it became more imperative than ever that the church put its own house in order, tackling the problem of casteism in the church before it could credibly address the broader society.

The protective discrimination for Scheduled Castes and Tribes reversed at a blow the possible economic and educational advantages of conversion to Christianity, and indeed provided new and compelling disincentives to conversions from the underprivileged groups. On the other hand this liberated the church from large-scale conversions for primarily economic motives. Yet the fact that conversions continued, and continue on an appreciable scale,[9] goes to suggest that Christianity (or Buddhism for that matter) still has attractive power independent of any material considerations.

Finally, all Christian thinkers in India after 1920, if not before, had to relate their thought to Mahatma Gandhi and his movement. This adjustment was made in various ways, some Christians becoming thoroughgoing Gandhians, others having substantial reservations, in a few cases amounting to virtual rejection. Most Christians were enthusiastic supporters of Gandhi's attack on untouchability, but many saw differences between Gandhi's notions on *varnashramadharma* and any Christian ideas on the proper ordering of society. It was unrealistic, many felt, to suggest that a static hereditary occupational division (not necessarily in itself desirable) could co-exist with parity of esteem and status for more than a very short period. Not only was Gandhi's own attitude towards the Depressed Classes sometimes seen as paternalistic and even patronizing, but it was suspected that this was the attitude he was trying to inculcate. Gandhi's attitude was perhaps betrayed when he advised a missionary to pray for the Harijans but not to try to convert them because they did not have 'the mind and intelligence to understand what you talked... Would you preach the Gospel to a cow?'[10] And many Christian thinkers shared Ambedkar's feeling

that the effect of a general acceptance of Gandhian techniques among the Untouchables would be more a weakening of their collective position and resignation to a lot made only slightly less unbearable. Had Christianity anything different and preferable to offer? And if so, what? This topic also engaged attention in the period under review.

(ii) S.K. Datta, K.T. Paul and S.K. Rudra

Surendra Kumar Datta (1878-1942) together with K.T. Paul (1876-1931) and S.K. Rudra (1861-1925) may well be counted as the Fathers of Indian Christian Nationalism. This is by no means to say that they were the first Christian nationalists — one need only mention names from the nineteenth century such as Lal Behari Day, Krishna Mohan Banerjea or Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya to show the contrary — but they were pioneers in moving the Indian church, or at least a significant section of it, into a position more sympathetic to nationalism and in remaining effective Christian leaders of all-India stature who were also deeply committed nationalists. Paul was an officer of the YMCA for most of his active life while Rudra and Datta were both college principals — Rudra the first Indian Principal of the prestigious St. Stephen's College in Delhi, Datta Principal of Forman Christian College, Lahore, a Member of the Legislative Assembly, and a participant at the Second Round Table Conference.[11]

None of the three saw the solution of the social problems of India as the simple displacement of the caste system by western social order, or by a Christian one if such a thing exists. They could discern some positive virtues in traditional Indian society as well as much injustice, much that was inhumane, and much that was stunting. What they sought was some kind of synthesis based on a Christian discrimination of what was best in the social traditions of East and West. S.K. Datta wrote: 'Caste has served in the past a useful purpose. To it is due the permanence and tenacity which has characterized Hindu society in the face of strong influences of disintegration such as have resulted from foreign invasions and lack of stable government. Caste stands for the point of view of the community and excludes the rights of the individual. This attitude has been a moral power, for it lays down certain rules of conduct and expects obedience. Thus caste has placed upon the community the responsibility of providing for the poor within its pale. In India accordingly there is no neccessity for a Poor Law.'[12] But caste has

become tyrannical, and ethical charges of great substance must be laid against it: it is inequitable, it fragments rather than uniting the broader community, and it makes true nationalism impossible. It frustrates individuality and discourages innovation: 'The strictness of caste law regarding individual action is cruel. A man may think or believe whatever he likes and is tolerated, but departure from established custom is met with the severest punishment.'[13] Furthermore, caste distorts and trivializes the moral sense: 'A man guilty of a heinous moral offence, if he keeps the rules and submits to the customs of his caste, goes uncondemned. A Hindu authority enumerates seven crimes which he terms, "the only acts which now lead to exclusion from caste." Six of these acts involve merely ceremonial impurity, such as travelling in Europe or America, or publicly eating beef or pork; the seventh is "embracing Christianity or Mohammedanism"'.[14] Caste presents the greatest of all obstacles to evangelisation, for 'Hinduism is excessively tolerant to heterodoxy of belief; nothing, however, is a greater blow to its dignity than violation of the social order.'[15] While it is possible that caste may be modified to make it less objectionable or even in such a way that 'the enormous power of the system may be exercised in the interests of morality,'[16] at present the church must be utterly opposed to caste both within itself and in society at large. 'Wisdom, sympathy and tact' will be needed in the battle against caste, but success in this battle is quite vital for if caste distinctions are tolerated in the church 'it will be fatal to the influence and power of Indian Christianity... This is the rock on which every spiritual movement in India has split.'[17] The Christian contribution to the new India of a broader and more flexible idea of fellowship and a truer and more liberated notion of individuality depends utterly upon the maintenance of an uncompromising stand on caste. But for all that, the Christian must be open to the true values which are as it were embalmed in the hard amber of the caste system, and beware of replacing caste with unbridled, disruptive individualism and callous competition.

(iii) The Rethinking Christianity Group

In the aftermath of the First World War a number of able South Indian Christians began to work together in a loose group around the Christo Samaj, the Bangalore Continuation Conference and a journal, the *Christian Patriot*. They were all nationalists, although their precise political affiliations varied, and most of them were graduates of the Madras Christian College and retained close

associations with the College. Almost all were laymen, the most prominent exception being A.J. Appasamy who became Bishop of Coimbatore. Of the others Chakkarai and Chenchiah were lawyers; Chakkarai was involved with the Justice Party and the non-Brahman movement in politics, and served on the Madras Corporation and the Madras Legislative Council as well as a term as Mayor of Madras; Chenchiah was less politically involved, and became Chief Justice of the High Court of the small princely state of Pudukottai. Both were converts, who had been much influenced by William Miller while students at Madras Christian College. Other members or associates of the group were teachers, doctors, or in other professions which made most of them financially independent of the missions. Their joint endeavour was to reconsider in the light of their knowledge of Indian thought, society and culture, the doctrine, structure and mission of Christianity in India. This they did through a series of books, pamphlets and articles, some of them joint productions, some written independently by a particular member of the group. The best known of these publications is that from which the group has taken its name, *Rethinking Christianity in India* (1938) which was written with the World Missionary Conference at Tambraram in mind, and is, at least in part, a powerful rejoinder to Kraemer.[18]

Most of the members of the group were suspicious and critical of the present form of the church in India as overtly western and basically uncongenial to the Indian spirit. Some suggested reforms in liturgy, church architecture and so on which were really relatively minor reforms; P. Chenchiah makes a thoroughgoing critique of the church as a hindrance to the Gospel, and encumbrance to the Christian mission, which startled most of his contemporaries with its clear suggestion that it was possible and indeed desirable to have a churchless Christianity. He speaks sympathetically of 'one of the fundamental principles of Hindu sociology' to the effect that 'society should not be organized throughout. There should be open areas in society where the individual owns no master and suffers no external restraint. This free space should be the domain of religion... Hinduism organizes strongly on the social side in order that man may be free religiously. The sadhu — The man of religion gets the freedom of society — stands beyond the obligations of caste which controls society... An all-powerful organization dominating religious life is repugnant to Hindu instinct... Hinduism has rejected after due deliberation the ideas that lie behind the Church — as detrimental to true growth in religion — as fatal to the freedom and liberty of the soul.'[19] The existence of a formally organized church, he argued, was

not a necessary implication of Christian faith, nor necessary for its continuation and propagation. Indeed in India the organized church would always lead to misunderstanding of the Gospel and thereby stifle evangelization, for in India all religious movements which became organizations degenerated into castes, encapsulated within Hindu society and isolated from the kind of contact with others on which evangelization depended.[20] The real task of Christianity being to permeate Hindu society, it follows that 'The policy of individual or mass conversion with the avowed object of forming the converts into a community or a Church should be radically modified', and that the idea that a person should be either a Hindu or a Christian should also be relinquished.[21]

On the face of it, it might seem that in rejecting the Church, Chenchiah has also abandoned any notion that Christianity involves an egalitarian social ethic, but this judgement would be more than a little superficial. He does not think of replacing the church with nothing but a loose alliance of Christian ashrams, as Boyd appears to believe.[22] The choice for Chenchiah is between Christianity as a movement with the spiritual power to transform Hindu society, and Christianity as a community in a country long blighted by communalism and doomed inevitably to become a caste which no longer is capable of presenting either a religious or a social challenge: 'The Christian community has the unique opportunity of rising above caste and community in this caste-ridden and communal India. I hope it will not surrender this high calling and be caught up in the passing show. In India to become a community is to purchase an assured future at the sacrifice of a great adventure. It would please every other community in India should we settle down like themselves into a community.'[23] It would be a mistake to dismiss all this as idle rhetoric, although it does have to be admitted that Chenchiah fails to spell out in practical detail the shape that his Christian movement could take. But that is surely the task for several generations of Christians rather than for one thinker, or one group of thinkers. Chenchiah's contribution is to insist that caste is no longer the primary issue; yet the implications of the debate on caste have continuing relevance. 'Caste', he believed, 'is doomed and is dying ... We have to fight the living foe and not the dying.'[24]

No other member of the Rethinking Christianity Group devotes as much attention as Chenchiah to a critique of the structure of the Church. V. Chakkarai and Eddy Asirvatham are the two whom one would expect to develop a theory of the Church's relation to Indian society and the Christian's role in social and political life, for

Chakkarai was deeply involved in politics and Asirvatham was a professional political scientist. Chakkarai is suspicious of attempts to replace the caste system with a class system; competition is not desirable in itself and class has mammon as its deity just as caste deifies birth. Although in the past caste has no doubt performed a useful function in Hindu society in as far as it has provided stability and security, now 'a casteless and classless society is the ideal of the social revolutionary, as of the Christian.'[25] While he believes that it is more important to be a Christian than a churchman, he clearly sees the church as an organized body having a major role in the overcoming of caste, class, and national differences and inequalities: 'I believe in the Church, as the Body of our Lord in a sense and with an intensity, such as is called for by the New Testament. I believe the Church is constituted not by mere cults but by communion with the living Lord for social action ... Therefore I believe that the Church should be supra-national and that the members of His Body should consider themselves and act as such, refusing allegiance to earthly states when they do things contrary to (the abolition of inequality and the establishment of an egalitarian order). I believe ... that the members of the Body should regard one another as more closely related than their own nationals.'[26] Asirvatham develops similar themes rather further; like Chakkarai, an organized church is for him a predicate of his social thought, and without the existence of an organized church he can see no possibility of an effective Christian social witness. He writes that only Christianity is capable of freeing man in any real sense from thraldom to caste and communalism: 'Christianity alone is capable of giving a truly national and international outlook. It alone can free a man from village politics and make him think in terms of world politics.'[27] Caste is integral to Hinduism and although he is clear that the Christian must reject it, he should also remember that it had its virtues: 'Caste hitherto has been something of a system of social insurance for its needy members and has exercised a salutary discipline upon the recalcitrant. It has given to its members a sense of belonging which the church has not yet fully given.'[28] Although there are still to be found harmful caste observances in the church, among Christians caste is 'only skin-deep' and with sound teaching and effective church discipline casteism can gradually be eliminated to enable the church to witness more effectively as a fellowship of equals.[29]

(iv) The Debate on Mass Movements[30]

In the 1930s when the discontent of the Depressed Classes and the

mass conversions to Christianity reached a peak, Gandhi's resolute affirmation that conversion was a totally misguided response to the problems facing the Harijans, and that Christian efforts to nourish mass conversions were perverse and politically motivated, provoked a polarization of opinion among Indian Christians. On the one hand, there were those who accepted Gandhi's point of view without any significant qualification and threw themselves with great enthusiasm into the Gandhian movement. Two of the most notable of this group were J.C. Kumarappa and S.K. George. On the other hand there were men who were thoroughly committed to mass-movement evangelism. Some of them were critical of the Gandhian strategy for the uplift of the Depressed Classes, and most of them were deeply involved with the National Missionary Society. P.O. Philip, K.T. Paul and Bishop V.S. Azariah of Dornakal are good representatives of this tendency: ardent nationalists all, sympathetic to indigenization, but theologically and evangelistically rather conservative.[31]

A mediating position was taken up by the signatories of 'An Indian Christian Manifesto' on 'Christian Duty to the Depressed and Backward Classes' which was published in March 1937 in response particularly to Gandhian criticisms of the mass movements.[32] The Manifesto announced that although in the past Indian unrest has contained a 'note of religious quest' at the present time 'due chiefly to the spread of nationalism, religious values seem to have receded into the background'. The signatories recognize that there has always been opposition to the tyranny of caste among liberal-minded Hindus, and see signs that modern Hindu reformers – particularly Mahatma Gandhi – have made efforts for the uplift of the depressed which have met with marked success. But even the Hindu reformers, even the most liberal of Hindus, could not but view with alarm the drift of Untouchables from Hinduism to other faiths, particularly Christianity, for the fact that the Christian community has on the whole stood aside from the national movement makes the Hindu regard 'any migration, large or small, from the Hindu to the Christian community as a loss to the nation .. (and) a direct blow to his political strength.' The signatories 'rejoice with the Depressed and Backward Classes in the successes which have recently met efforts for their uplift', particularly the opening of the Travancore State Temples, and they believe 'that the process of absorption ... into the Hindu community in which a serious beginning has been made, is likely to confer on the present generation of the Depressed and Backward Classes immediate benefits on a large scale which the

Church will not be able to give to the whole community.' The integration of the mass of the Depressed Classes into Hinduism would be 'a reform which is bound to have a wholesome effect on the entire social structure of India, including the Indian Church, by solving the problem of caste prejudices in the home of their origin.' While antagonistic to mass conversions because of their effects on Hindu society, on the Depressed Classes themselves, and on the Church, the Manifesto nevertheless affirms that 'individuals or family or village groups will continue to seek the fellowship of the Christian Church. That is the real movement of the Spirit of God, and no power on earth can stem that tide. It will be the duty of the Christian Church in India to receive such seekers after the truth as it is in Jesus Christ and provide for them instruction and spiritual nurture.' The mass movements had resulted in a distortion and narrowing of the Gospel: 'We are convinced that the Gospel of Jesus is a Gospel not only to the poor and down-trodden masses in India but to all sections of the country's population, and that the task before the Indian Church is to permeate the ideology and outlook of the land with a genuine respect for the teachings of Jesus and a willingness to accept His leadership in all that concerns personal happiness and national well-being.'

The carefully balanced statement of the Manifesto managed to antagonize almost everyone. Gandhi responded vigorously and negatively to the 'courteously patronizing' tone of the statement.[33] Manilal Parekh's book *Christian Proselytism in India: A Great and Growing Menace* (Rajkot, 1943) represents a strong Christian nationalist response both to the position of the National Missionary Society and to the middle-of-the-road nationalism represented by the signatories of the Manifesto.[34] Parekh was a convert from the Brahmo Samaj. He wrote about himself: 'In 1918 I took baptism, and for about a year remained a kind of active member of the Anglican Church, but since 1919 I have severed my active relations with all missions and churches, and have been working as an independent evangelist, going about all over the country and even outside. I call myself a Hindu disciple of Christ, and live with my own people, none of whom is baptized.'[35] In the past *bhakti* systems had 'brought the highest religion to the lowliest, and united in one common brotherhood people of all classes and creeds. Even the Untouchables and the Moslems were not alien to it. It softened the rigours of caste and class, and leavened the mass of Hindu humanity into one whole such as had not been possible before.'[36] Christianity's true vocation is to be the *bhakti* of the new India, affecting Indian

religion and society precisely as the *bhakti* sects of the past had done. But instead of this, the aggressive policy of proselytizing was threatening a 'national schism' like that which resulted from the Muslim invasion. Not only were converts denationalized but the churches were desperately trying to build up their numerical strength and improve their competitive position rather than seeking humbly to serve the nation as a whole.

Parekh's view of the Gospel is a very highly spiritualized one: he does not seem to believe that there is any such thing as Christian social teaching, and he is unqualified in his approval of de Nobili's missionary policy, including his tolerance of caste: it 'was fully in conformity with the teaching of Christ, his apostles, and the Catholic Church. All these never meant the Christian religion to be a social or a political revolution, their aim being merely to change the life of the individual from sinfulness to godliness.'[37] Many of Parekh's criticisms of missionaries are cogent and perceptive,[38] but his conclusion is a Christianity whose social ethic is more emolient than prophetic. Parekh adds to the suspicion of the denationalizing effect of Christianity, which he shared with many others, the beginnings of a critique of baptism: is not the rite distorted and its significance obscured when it is regarded as primarily the sign of transfer from one religious community to another? Has this not served to conceal the real distinctiveness of Christian fellowship and also the relevance of the Christian social ethic to the broader society and to national rather than individual or ecclesiastical issues?

(v) P.D. Devanandan and M.M. Thomas: Caste, Christianity and Nation Building

With the coming of Independence the terms of the discussion changed to some extent. As P.D. Devanandan pointed out in 1958, the caste system had been changing in a whole variety of ways and had demonstrated both that it could slough off some of its objectionable features and also adapt itself to modernity, sometimes in a constructive fashion. This new situation means that there is no longer a need for a Christian onslaught on caste, but Christians should involve themselves understandingly and constructively in the ongoing repatterning of social structure which is taking place in India. The main lines of the missionary criticism of caste had now been widely accepted and these criticisms were a major continuing element in the construction of the new India. Not that the war was over, but a major battle had been won, and the Christians now found

themselves fighting alongside a huge detachment of enlightened Hindus, Muslims and secularists. It also remained true that casteism survives in the church and strenuous efforts must be made to eradicate it, for the relevant task for the church was now the positive demonstration of a new and challenging pattern of non-communal, non-competitive society rather than the negative attack on a dying social order.[39]

M.M. Thomas, Devanandan's successor as Director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in Bangalore, has carried the discussion a good deal further. He makes it clear that the issue is no longer the simple one of whether a Christian can be for or against caste, whether caste practices can be tolerated in the church, but has become a question of the nature of the church understood over against the notions of religious community and secular state. M.M. Thomas is as aware as Devanandan was of the extent of the direct and indirect Christian contribution to the making of the new India, and he affirms the earlier attack on caste: the missionaries 'became the bearers of social and cultural humanization as their very approach to the outcastes with the Gospel changed the spiritual foundations of the inbuilt structures of the caste system.'[40] De Nobili's missionary strategy was wrong because he 'separated sociological realities entirely from renewal in Christ.'[41] Such an approach would now be totally irrelevant in a nation which is moving towards a casteless society. The problem for the church is how to purify its life in such a way that it demonstrates a 'non-communal *koinonia*' (the phrase is Richard Taylor's) as an answer to some of India's most pressing sociological problems. The church must pioneer ways of living in fellowship with all on the basis of a common humanity,[42] and this it can only do if it can be the church without being also a religious community. Thomas recognizes that much has already been achieved: 'The outcastes, the poor and the orphans saw Christian faith as the source of a new humanizing influence and the foundation of a human community. Where conversion was genuine, whether of individuals or of groups, the converts saw Salvation in Christ not only in terms of individual salvation, of heaven after death, but also as the spiritual source of a new community on earth in which their human dignity and status were recognized. It was the promise of humanization inherent in the gospel of salvation which led to the influx of the oppressed into the church.'[43] It would be too much to say that Thomas spells out in wholly convincing fashion how it is possible to have an organized church which is yet not in any sense a religious community — he has

been accused of dissolving away the whole concept of the church.[44] But he has shifted the debate on to a new plane where broader issues have put the question of caste for Christians into its proper perspective in the India of the 1970s.[45]

NOTES TO CHAPTER IX

1 See Michael Hollis, *Paternalism and the Church*. London, 1962, and G.A. Oddie, 'Indian Christians and the National Congress, 1885 – 1910' *Indian Church History Review*, Vol. II/I (1968) pp. 45-54.

2 Ernst Troeltsch, *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions* (1909), trans. David Reid. London, 1972, p. 131.

3 Ibid., p. 126.

4 From his essay, 'The Place of Christianity among the World Religions' (1923) in E. Troeltsch, *Christian Thought: Its History and Application*. ed. F. von Hugel. New York, 1957, p. 52. My italics.

5 The best presentations of the theological presuppositions of the Lutheran attitude to caste are those of Karl F.L. Graul. See his *Explanations concerning the Principles of the Leipzig Missionary Society with Regard to the Caste Question*. Madras, 1851, and *Die Stellung der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Mission in Leipzig zur Ostindischen Kastenfrage*. Leipzig, 1861.

6 James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation*. London, 1966, passim.

7 It is a mistake to consider Kraemer simply as a Barthian; the sources of his theology are quite complex. See C.F. Hallencreutz, *Kraemer Towards Tambaram*. Uppsala, 1966.

8 M.M. Thomas, *The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution*. Lucknow, 1967, pp. 99-100.

9 Since the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Christians have steadily increased at a substantially faster rate than the population as a whole.

10 *Harijan*, Dec. 19, 1936, cited in J. Michael Mahar, ed. *The Untouchables in Contemporary India*. Tucson, 1972, p.88. Cf. Gandhi's statement quoted in *The Guardian* (Madras) 7 Jan. 1937: 'To approach the Palavas and Pariahs with their palsied hands and palsied intelligence is no Christianity.'

11 See H.A. Popley, *K.T. Paul: Christian Leader*. Calcutta, 1938; M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*. Madras, 1970, pp. 266 - 274. K.T. Paul's views on caste may be found in his *The British Connection with India*. London, 1927, pp. 53-56.

12 S.K. Datta, *The Desire of India*. London, 1908, pp. 66-67.

13 Ibid., p. 67.

14 Ibid., p. 67.

15 Ibid., p. 218.

16 Ibid., p. 68.

17 Ibid., p. 223.

18 There is so far no adequate account of the Rethinking Christianity Group. The best discussion of their theology is in chapters VII, VIII and IX of Boyd, *Indian Christian Theology* where the main focus is on Appasamy, Chenchiah and Chakkarai. There is more emphasis on the

group's political and social teachings in Thomas, *Acknowledged Christ*, Chaps. VII and IX. Appasamy and Chenchiah are the subjects of chapters in Friso Melzer, *Indische Weisheit und Christliche Erkenntnis*. Tübingen, 1948. Recently the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, has published several very useful volumes, particularly D.A. Thangasamy (ed.), *The Theology of Chenchiah* (1966); P.T. Thomas (ed.), *The Theology of Chakkarai* (1968); A.J. Appasamy, *My Theological Quest* (1964); Eddy Asivatham, *The Evolution of my Social Thinking* (1970). For the social thought of the group, the following are the most relevant sources in addition to articles in journals such as the *Christian Patriot* and *The Guardian*: P. Chenchiah, V. Chakkarai, and A.N. Sudarisanam, *Asramas Past and Present*. Madras, 1940; Milton Stauffer (ed.), *An Indian Approach to India*. New York, 1927; A.J. Appasamy, *The Christian Task in Independent India*. London, 1951; Eddy Asirvatham, *Christianity in the Indian Crucible*. Calcutta, 1955, G.V. Job, P. Chenchiah, V. Chakkarai, D.M. Devasahayam, S. Jesudasen, Eddy Asirvatham and A.N. Sundarisanam, *Rethinking Christianity in India*. Madras, 1938.

19 *Rethinking Christianity*, pp. 88-90.

20 Ibid., p. 97.

21 Ibid., p. 192.

22 Boyd, op.cit., p. 160.

23 Thangasamy, op.cit., p. 309.

24 P. Chenchiah, 'Caste, Society, Church', cyclostyled – c. 1952 – in U.T.C. Archives, Bangalore.

25 *Rethinking Christianity*, pp. 153-4 and 163-4.

26 P.T. Thomas, op.cit., p. 45.

27 *Rethinking Christianity*, p. 300.

28 Asirvatham, *Indian Crucible*, p. 111.

29 Ibid., pp. 155-6; *Rethinking Christianity*, p. 300: Asirvatham *Evolution* pp. 8-9 and 35.

30 On the Mass Movements, see also chapter IV.

31 See P.O. Philips, *The Depressed Classes and Christianity*. Madras, 1925; H.A. Popley, *K.T. Paul – Christian Leader*. Calcutta, 1938; Carol Graham, *Azariah of Dornakal*. London 1946.

32 Published in *The Guardian* (Madras) of 11 March, 1937. It was reprinted in *The Depressed Classes: A Chronological Documentation*. Ranchi and Kurseong, 1935-37, pp. 354-359. The signatories, who were mainly from the Rethinking Christianity circle or from Christian Ashrams, were: J.D. Asirvadam, K.K. Chandy, S. Gnanapragasam, S. Gurupatham, S. Jesudasen, M.P. Job, G.V. Joseph, K.I. Mathai, A.A. Paul, S.E. Rungnanadhan, A.N. Sudarisanam, O.F.E. Zacharias. Cf. M.M. Thomas, op.cit., pp. 216-221.

33 *Harijan*, 3 April, 1937, cited in *The Depressed Classes*, pp. 365-7.

34 I have been unable to obtain a copy of this work. My comments on it here are derived from M.M. Thomas's discussion, op.cit., pp.264-6.
35 Stauffer, ed., *The Indian Approach to India,* p. vii.
36 Ibid., p. 13. He was specifically attracted to the Satsangha of the Swami Narayana sect (on which see D. Pocock, *Mind, Body and Wealth*). Here people observing different cults could join without breaking caste or social links, Fellowship in the truth rather than social equality should be the Church's aim. See R.H.S. Boyd, *Manilal C. Parekh and Dhanjibhai Fakirbhai*. Bangalore, 1974, pp. 6 and 14.
37 M.M. Thomas, op.cit., p. 264.
38 An earlier and rather intemperate statement of some of the same criticisms of missionary attitudes to caste is D.J. Melchizedek, *The High Caste Indians and Christianity*. Madras, 1909.
39 P.D. Devanandan, 'Caste, the Christian and the Nation in India Today', *Ecumenical Review XI* (1958-9) pp. 268-281; *Christian Concern in Hinduism*, Bangalore, 1961, pp. 28-32; *Preparation for Dialogue,* Bangalore, 1964, pp. 8-9, 17-18, 24-25, 46-51.
40 Letter to Bishop Newbigin, *Religion and Society*, XIX/1 (March 1972), p. 74.
41 Letter to Bishop Newbigin, *Religion and Society*, XIX/1 (March 1972), p. 74.
42 M.M. Thomas, *The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution*, Lucknow, 1967.
43 Thomas, *Salvation and Humanisation*, p. 14.
44 See the review of *Salvation and Humanisation* by Lesslie Newbigin, in *Religion and Society*, XVIII/I (March, 1971) pp. 4 to 80, and the ensuing discussion in Vol. XIX/1 (March 1972) pp. 69-90.
45 I would refer here simply to the very significant issue of *Religion and Society* (XIX/1) on 'Conversion and Baptism in the Cultural Context of India'. The questions raised in a discussion such as this were implicit in the earlier debates about caste, and the participants in the contemporary discussions on ecclesiology in India can learn much from the history of the caste question.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

The area we have surveyed in this book is a small, but none the less significant part of a far larger encounter – the meeting of India and the West. In this encounter Christianity in its various forms has provided one dimension which is not always easy to distinguish from other aspects of the western impact. But efforts such as we have made to tease out one strand in the interaction and subject it to detailed examination are necessary if we are eventually to have a clearer understanding of the making of modern India. It is, however, necessary to remember that interactions of the sort we are considering have an important element of reciprocity. In the encounter around the question of caste, for instance, Christian attitudes and policies were not introduced full-grown, as it were, from the West, and then proceeded to affect Indian social realities. Christian views and Christian behaviour were initially shaped and repeatedly modified in response to a wide range of factors, by no means all of them of European or American provenance.

It should be clear from all that has gone before that one cannot properly speak of *the* Christian understanding of caste, or even of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant view of caste; Christian attitudes were multifarious, and even if they bear family resemblances to each other, the differences between them, to which we have devoted considerable attention, are important whatever the roots of these differences may be. Family resemblances arise from the fact that all Christian views, in order to count as Christian, must recognize in the Gospel, however understood, some kind of ultimate criterion. But differences in the interpretation of the Gospel and the influence of a variety of other factors, whether consciously acknowledged or not, explain the diversity of attitude which the historian discovers.

Anglo-Saxon Protestant missionaries did not, of course, come empty-handed, or empty-headed, to India. The Bible which they brought, and quickly translated, was understood in the light of specific and conscious theological commitments, and beyond that they brought expectations, attitudes, presuppositions, hopes and prejudices, some of which seemed to them (but not to us, or to their Indian contacts) axiomatic, and of others of which they were usually unconscious. The early Anglo-Saxon Protestants had far less by way of a sophisticated and systematic theory of society and culture and their relation to religion than did the Roman Catholics or the

Lutherans of the Leipzig Society, and this helps to account for elements of uncertainty, or even plain muddle, in their attempts to develop an understanding of caste. For the most part the early missionaries came with a rather simple evangelical theology, the social implications of which had to be worked out 'on the field', often without appropriate conceptual tools being easily to hand. Only gradually did they become aware that caste was a major and unavoidable issue.

We must also note the influence of the social and cultural backgrounds from which the missionaries came. The early English Dissenters such as the Serampore Baptists came for the most part from the ranks of the 'skilled mechanics', and called down upon themselves on this account the scorn of such as Sydney Smith. Why, he wondered with characteristic exaggeration, do 'such religious embassies ... devolve upon the lowest of the people? ... If a tinker is a devout man, he infallibly sets off for the East.'[1] Smith very accurately represented the fears of moderate and aristocratic English opinion at the dangerous social, religious and political consequences of allowing men from the lower ranks of society deeply infected with radical, eccentric, and Jacobin views to attempt to propagate the Gospel in India. He was correct in believing that the egalitarian orientation which they had developed as a result of their resentment at the restraints of class in England would predispose them to question the social order in India, although less right in regarding them as politically seditious to British rule in India.

The Scottish missionaries, both those who like John Wilson of Bombay came initially under the Scottish Missionary Society, and Alexander Duff and his successors who were sent by the established Church of Scotland, brought a difference of emphasis relating to their different background. Scotland, in contrast to England, was a more egalitarian society, in which emphasis was given to the importance of education and the need for open access to education for all ranks of society. For the Scottish missionaries the spread of enlightenment and the propagation of the Gospel were virtually indistinguishable, or at least continuous with one another, and their initial objections to caste arose from seeing it as an obstacle to the diffusion of enlightenment. They had a developed Calvinist theology which made them less individualist than either the English Dissenters or the early German Pietists of the Royal Danish Mission, and helped them to see evangelism as an historical process which necessarily involved a Christian reshaping of society.

The first Anglican missionaries came almost without exception from the Evangelical wing of the Church of England, which had already that commitment to social reform best shown in England in the so-called Clapham Sect. Particularly during Daniel Wilson's long tenure of the see of Calcutta (1832-1858) Anglicans in India had on the whole friendly relations with Dissenters. Theologically they had much in common. The Dissenters had been earlier in the field, and Anglicans benefitted from their experience and generally took over the Dissenters' attitudes towards caste. Most American missions in India were Presbyterian, Congregationalist, or Baptist, and therefore had a similar theology to the British missions discussed above; in their case the egalitarian emphasis in their thinking was strongly reinforced by American democratic notions.

We have endeavoured to establish that theology profoundly affected the understanding and assessment of caste, and that differences in theology were frequently at the root of differences in attitude to caste. This is particularly clear when we compare the three groups – the Roman Catholics, the German Lutherans, and the Anglo-Saxon Calvinists and Evangelicals with whom we are particularly concerned in this book. Among the last there were, as we have seen, important differences of theological emphasis which were reflected in a variety of attitudes to caste, but these differences tended to coalesce in the first half of the nineteenth century, leading to a high degree of agreement on the proper attitude towards caste, and very similar policies in dealing with the problem.

Changes took place over time, partly in positive or negative reaction to theological changes in the West. Prominent among these changes were the increasing questioning of the old Calvinist orthodoxy, and the development of theological liberalism.

But it needs to be underlined that any kind of positive affirmation of caste was so rare as to be almost inconceivable. Upadhyaya and Parekh are really the only two among those we have examined who have much good to say of caste, and they do not go much beyond criticizing the attack on caste as an instance of western uncomprehending aggression, and comparing class and caste in such a way as to suggest that caste is less in conflict with Christian principles than class. The more liberal missionaries, such as Farquhar and Lucas, while not denying that there was an incompatibility between caste and Christianity, were prepared to recognize positive elements in caste. They and others recognized that caste provided a useful structure of social cohesion, that it preserved the vital insight that there was a need for a divinely sanctioned social

order, and that there were potentialities in caste which might enable it, if purged, to provide the basis for an idyllic social system. But caste as it was experienced had substantial aspects which conflicted blatantly with Christian principles. Many of the liberals accepted the main outlines of the Protestant critique of caste but felt that much action against caste had been rash and ill-advised.

The growth of Anglo-Catholicism and, much later, the rise of the ecumenical movement had their effects, in the case of the former a new emphasis on the church as the form of the divine society which questioned the individualism both of pietism and of liberalism. The latter had many of its roots in the missionary movement, and served to reinforce the criticism of caste distinctions by its emphasis on the removal of denominational barriers which obstructed fellowship among men.

Yet, when every allowance has been made for differences of emphasis and of policy arising in part from varying theological commitments, it remains to note a matter of great significance: whatever the differences among them, missionaries of all persuasions were united in feeling uneasy about caste. They differed in their analysis of what was wrong with caste, and what to do about it. For some caste was acceptable if disjoined from Hinduism. For others the problem was the 'caste-spirit' rather than caste itself. Some wished, somewhat naively, to destroy caste, while others favoured a more gradualist policy. Hardly any gave any kind of general approval to caste. The Roman Curia showed itself consistently opposed to untouchability and the idea of hereditary pollution, while willing to encourage a policy of accommodation to many caste practices. It is hard not to see in this distinctive and well-nigh unanimous unease concerning caste a recognition of some fundamental incompatability between Christianity and the theory and practice of caste.

Other factors which undoubtedly affected the missionary assessment of caste arise from the general western climate of thought. We have noted in earlier chapters the influence of some western intellectual movements – utilitarianism, German romanticism, the Scottish Enlightenment, and the rise of modern indology, for example. We have not had space to discuss in detail the difficult question of the influence on missionaries of changing notions of imperialism, of the British role in India, and of the rise of Indian nationalism. Some missionary antagonism to caste, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, seems to reflect a good deal of arrogance and a general incapacity to understand or

appreciate whatever was alien. Caste sometimes appears, for example, as part of a motley collection of practices which are certainly strange to westerners, and because of this are somewhat arbitrarily labelled unchristian. At one time or another caste has been denounced as heathen and dangerous along with such things as the wearing of flowers in women's hair, erecting *pandals* (temporary shelters) for weddings, beating drums and going in processions for Christian festivals, wearing the *kudumi* (topknot), dancing, etc. All were believed to be intertwined with Hinduism, all were to be set aside like caste at baptism. But what is surprising is not so much the ethnocentrism of such views, but that when increased knowledge and experience led to reassessment and a more discriminating and liberal approach to things Indian, the opposition to caste was reaffirmed and even strengthened.

In considering the factors which contributed to the initial formulation and later reshaping of Christian attitudes towards caste it is important to remember that many of these factors were not extraneous to India, but sprang from experience of caste as a social reality, and were modified in relation to changes and developments in India. The early missionaries, such as the Serampore Baptists, first encountered caste as an obstacle to their efforts to convert individuals to Christianity, for baptism involved an irrevocable breach of caste, a sacrifice of appalling scale the inevitability of which held back inquirers from taking the final step. John Thomas, the pioneer whose work in Bengal inspired Carey to join him, noted as a result of his experience in the 1780s that 'The greatest difficulty in spreading the gospel in Bengal arises from the caste: for all who are baptized, and partake of bread and wine with us, *will lose caste*; and when a man has lost caste, his most intimate friends and nearest relations will forsake him for ever. He cannot possibly be restored by any means; and the meanest Hindoo, from that time, refuses to eat, drink, or converse with him; he becomes an outcast and a vagabond in their eyes, in the most strict sense.'[2] Carey himself found that suggestions from supporters at home that he should deal gently with the caste scruples of converts were rather beside the point; even if he had made every concession to permit converts to retain caste observances, 'they would undoubtedly be cast out of society in that case was well as the other.'[3] This kind of obstacle to conversion was quite naturally seen as a gross infringement of individual liberty – 'one of the most cursed engines that ever the devil invented to enslave the souls of men'[4] – and thus radically at variance with the individualism characteristic of the evangelical movement. But if

caste impeded evangelism it also stood firmly, the missionaries believed, in the way of all diffusion of enlightenment, ensuring a monopoly of learning for the Brahmans and other high castes and condemning the rest to perpetual bondage to ignorance. Caste efficaciously denied freedom of conscience and sustained the existence of an exclusive elite of illuminati, together with the perpetuation of the degradation and ignorance of the lower ranks of society.

The inequality characteristic of caste denied man his proper freedom and condemned him to continue in the lot in which he found himself without any this-worldly hope. It meant in practice that various ordinary acts of kindness were impossible between people from different castes, and that the kind of fellowship and unity which seemed to the missionaries both proper and Christian was frustrated. Caste divided people rather than drawing them together; it weakened society and the bonds of benevolence and love.

But the objections to caste were not only ethical and strategic, but also specifically religious and theological. If missionaries first became aware of caste as an obstacle to conversion they felt on closer acquaintance that it was an immoral social order which was essentially opposed to Christianity because it was part and parcel of Hinduism. A few missionaries might be at pains to distinguish the civil and the religious elements in caste, but such efforts did not find much support from Hindus, who agreed with the majority missionary opinion that caste and the Hindu religion were so intimately wrought together that the one could barely be distinguished from the other. Hinduism provided the religious sanctions and the religious legitimation for caste, while caste was the classic example of a social order providing the iron frame for a religion. The two stood, or fell, together. From this flowed the specifically theological objections to caste, as distinct from objections which were more generally ethical, strategic, or sociological. The particular elements in the ideological undergirding of caste which attracted criticism included the system of *karma* and reincarnation, which was seen as quite incompatible with Christian teaching and as having implications for the understanding of man and of society. Karma was regarded as a mechanical system the operation of which would virtually exclude what Christians understood as grace, and reincarnation made of history a meaningless cycle in which the only real hope was that of ultimate escape from the empty illusory existence of this world. The karmic scheme provided a blanket justification for the social order which

excluded any prophetic understanding of society, or any belief that God might work in and through social change and reveal himself in the processes of history. While Christians believed that God had made man a little lower than the angels, the missionaries understood caste as inculcating the belief that a man's distance from the angels varied in relation to his caste. Direct and equal access to the holy was denied, and caste struggled to retain and restore the barriers between man and God, and consequently between man and man, which Christ had broken down on the cross.

It is clear, then, that the missionary objections to caste were of various kinds – theological, ethical, strategic. There were, it is true, situations where caste was not seen as a significant obstacle to the spread of the gospel, and situations where caste was tolerated. De Nobili and the Roman Catholic missions in the South tended to regard caste as a relatively minor problem to which the missions could adapt by way of certain pastoral and ecclesiastical rearrangements. Attempts were made to play down the significance of the caste issue theologically, ethically, and strategically. The Tranquebar Lutherans tolerated more caste observances among Christians than did the other Protestant missions and were more than reluctant to join in any kind of Christian onslaught on the caste system. From the early days of the mass movements some missionaries began to recognize certain virtues in caste and acknowledged that in some circumstances caste had shown itself to be an aid rather than an obstacle to conversion. But through all these differences of view there was an almost uninterrupted conviction that caste was problematic for the Christian. The argument did not revolve around the question whether or not caste was Christian, or compatible with Christianity, but rather around the tactical question of how to deal with an institution which, as it stood, virtually all Christians found offensive to a greater or a lesser degree.

Our study has been concerned not only with the shaping and reshaping of certain ideas on caste. We have also inquired into the policies in which these ideas were expressed, and the effects of, and reactions to, these ideas and policies. We have seen how the attempted enforcement of a strict discipline on the caste question in the Protestant churches was highly controversial and often divisive, and apparently discouraged rapid numerical growth through recruitment from castes of middle and high status. It was certainly, however, a factor in instigating and sustaining large-scale accessions from the depressed classes which made all the churches increasingly communities of the economically and socially under-privileged. As a

consequence, new caste problems and tensions were brought into the churches, such as those between converts from the Mala and Madiga castes in the Telugu country.

Para-churches such as the movement around K. Subba Rao, or the 'anonymous Christians' of Sivakasi, sprang up, composed of people who were believers in Jesus Christ but for a variety of reasons rejected the 'official' church and refused baptism. Their reasons normally included reluctance to belong to a church which was overwhelmingly composed of people from the lowest castes, and refusal themselves to renounce caste.[5] In other cases Christians of a particular caste found the churches' refusal to recognize caste distinctions so offensive that they seceded and established a caste church. The best known and most vigorous instance of this is the Nadar 'Hindu Christian Community' or *Nattu Sabai* in Tirunelveli.[6]

The Roman Catholics seem to have been more successful in avoiding such schisms by allowing a high degree of segregation between Catholics of different caste background, but by the 1930s they discovered that this policy had become counterproductive as Catholics of low caste origin would not accept the older policies, and the church was increasingly criticized for its policy of accommodation to caste. The Syrian Christians also, as we noted in chapter 5, showed signs of uneasiness about continuing to operate as a caste and observe caste rules, particularly in their relations with other Christians. While it is, of course, true that there is a continuing problem of 'casteism' in the churches, it is a fact that today all churches regard it as a problem and strive to deal with it in ways which are reminiscent of the policies of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant missions in the nineteenth century.

Missionary-sponsored attacks on caste in society at large were on the whole naive, unrealistic and, in terms of their stated objectives, unsuccessful. They certainly underestimated the resilience of the caste system and its capacity to adapt itself to new circumstances. Only from the end of the nineteenth century were there prominent missionaries who believed, with Max Müller, that caste could not, and perhaps should not, be destroyed. What the missionaries did achieve in particular instances, some of which we have noted, was the protection against indignities and oppression of groups of low-caste people through astute use of the courts and appeals for government protection. Some of these instances were well publicized, and had an exemplary role in teaching the low castes how to avail themselves of new possibilities of uplift and defence.

But the most significant achievement of the Protestant critique of caste was undoubtedly its major contribution towards a radical transformation of educated opinion in India. Egalitarian ideas first introduced to India by Protestant missionaries have shown themselves strikingly attractive to the depressed and transformingly challenging to educated opinion. Views on caste which were at the start of our period held and expressed by hardly anyone except Protestant missionaries have now become part of the conventional wisdom. Even within the more conservative sections of the Hindu community it has now become unfashionable to defend caste observances. Hardly anyone has any good to say of caste, and intelligent people who ought to know better often speak as if the caste system had ceased to exist, or can be destroyed by statutory edict.

It was not only opinions that changed, but caste as well. It is abundantly obvious that the transformation of opinion was sometimes a superficial thing, affecting behaviour hardly at all. But the change in feeling, particularly among the educated, and the consequential changes in law and in practice did certainly have some effect, although perhaps not so much as is sometimes suggested. Other pressures, too, served to break down the rigidity of the traditional social order - urbanization, education, improved communications, and so forth. It is not possible to assess the relative strength of the various factors making for change in caste, although it is surely reasonable to suppose that Protestant opinions and practice did have considerable influence. We do not have the space here to enter into the ramifications and complexities of change in the caste system. Suffice it to say that caste has shown itself quite amazingly resilient and adaptable to new challenges and new opportunities. Caste has, for instance, shown itself well able to adapt itself to the demands and the styles of the new competitive political arena; it continues influential in a somewhat altered form in urban settings and in modern industry; caste attitudes and customs persist, and in some cases even strengthen, in the context of modernity. Although it has become unfashionable for educated people to defend caste or casteism, caste continues to be a mighty instrument for shaping social behaviour and persists despite legislative enactments directed towards its destruction. Untouchability and the prejudices and beliefs which lie behind it still exist. But caste is changing - of that there can be no doubt for the signs of the travail of social change are everywhere apparent.

It has become commonplace among anthropologists to regard Christians in India as deeply affected by the ideology and values of

Hinduism, and in particular as being powerless against the pervasive influence of caste. Louis Dumont, for example, sees adherence to a monotheistic religion with egalitarian tendencies as incapable of undercutting 'the fundamental attitudes on which the caste system is based', and 'impotent against them.'[7] He speaks freely of Hindu influences upon Christians as responsible for the survival of caste attitudes among them,[8] and calls for more research to explain the survival of caste or caste-like groups in religious communities where what he considers the ideology of caste is at least in principle rejected.[9] He nowhere admits the possibility that Christian attitudes to caste may have significantly affected the social behaviour or ideology in Indian society as a whole. C.J. Fuller, as a result of his field studies in Kerala, argues that 'the egalitarian aspects of Christianity, as of Islam and Buddhism, have had negligible effect on the Hindu way of life.'[10] A variety of other studies have also shown how deeply the social behaviour of Christians in India is influenced by the principles of caste, but hardly any attention has been paid to the possibility that there might have been a countervailing egalitarian influence which has had a significant impact on the social thought, behaviour, and structure of India.[11]

It has been the purpose of this book to argue that the Protestant critique of caste which slowly developed since the late eighteenth century has had a notable influence in the shaping of ideas and the modification of behaviour far beyond the boundaries of the Protestant churches. If what claims to be no more than a preliminary study has done something to redress the balance of scholarly discussion, the author will rest content.

NOTES TO CHAPTER X

1 *The Edinburgh Review,* April 1808 (Vol XII) pp,197-180.
2 *Periodical Accounts of the Baptist Missionary Society,* Vol.I, London, 1800, p.20.
3 Ibid p.361.
4 Ibid p.126.
5 Kaj Baago, *The Movement around Subba Rao.* Madras and Bangalore, 1968.
6 M.Thomas Thangaraj, "The History and Teaching of the Hindu Christian Community Commonly called Nattu Sabai in Tirunelveli", *Indian Church History Review,* Vol.V, No.1 (1971), pp.43-68.
7 Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus,* p.251
8 Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus,* p.258
9 Ibid pp.83-4.
10 C.J. Fuller, "Kerala Christians and the Caste System". *Man* (N.S.) II, p.65.
11 Jonathan Parry ('Egalitarian Values in a Hierarchical Society', *South Asian Review,* 7/2, January 1974, p.118) calls for study on 'the extent to which the great tradition of ... Christianity influences the ideas and behaviour of Indian Christians.' We argue that Christian egalitarian ideas have been influential far beyond the ranks of Indian Christians, who are, after all, a small if interesting minority of the population of India.

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